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HENRIK IBSEN

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HENRIK IBSEN

COPYRIGHT EDITION

VOLUME I

LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG

LOVE'S COMEDY

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY

WILLIAM ARCHER

AND

C. H. HERFORD, LITT.D., M.A.

NEW YORK
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1913

"THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG," AND INTRODUCTIONS
BY WILLIAM ARCHER

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GENERAL PREFACE.

The eleven volumes of this edition contain all, save one, of the dramas which Henrik Ibsen himself admitted to the canon of his works. The one exception is his earliest, and very immature, tragedy, *Catilina*, first published in 1850, and republished in 1875. This play is interesting in the light reflected from the poet's later achievements, but has little or no inherent value. A great part of its interest lies in the very crudities of its style, which it would be a thankless task to reproduce in translation. Moreover, the poet impaired even its biographical value by largely rewriting it before its republication. He did not make it, or attempt to make it, a better play, but he in some measure corrected its juvenility of expression. Which version, then, should a translator choose? To go back to the original would seem a deliberate disregard of the poet's wishes; while, on the other hand, the retouched version is clearly of far inferior interest. It seemed advisable, therefore, to leave the play alone, so far as this edition was concerned. Still more clearly did it

appear unnecessary to include *The Warrior's Barrow* and *Olaf Liliekrans*, two early plays which were never admitted to any edition prepared by the poet himself. They were included in a Supplementary Volume of the Norwegian collected edition, issued in 1902, when Ibsen's life-work was over. They have even less intrinsic value than *Catilina*, and ought certainly to be kept apart from the works by which he desired to be remembered. A fourth youthful production, *St. John's Night*, remains to this day in manuscript. Not even German piety has dragged it to light.

With two exceptions, the plays appear in their chronological order. The exceptions are *Love's Comedy*, which ought by rights to come between *The Vikings* and *The Pretenders*, and *Emperor and Galilean*, which ought to follow *The League of Youth* instead of preceding it. The reasons of convenience which prompted these departures from the exact order are pretty obvious. It seemed highly desirable to bring the two Saga Plays, if I may so call them, into one volume; while as for *Emperor and Galilean*, it could not have been placed between *The League of Youth* and *Pillars of Society* save by separating its two parts, and assigning *Caesar's Apostasy* to Volume V., *The Emperor Julian* to Volume VI.

For the translations of all the plays in this edition, except *Love's Comedy* and *Brand*, I am ultimately responsible, in the sense that I have exercised an unrestricted right of revision. This means, of course, that, in plays originally translated by others, the merits of the English version belong for the most part to the original translator, while the faults may have been introduced, and must have been sanctioned, by me. The revision, whether fortunate or otherwise, has in all cases been very thorough.

In their unrevised form, these translations have met with a good deal of praise and with some blame. I trust that the revision has rendered them more praiseworthy, but I can scarcely hope that it has met all the objections of those critics who have found them blameworthy. For, in some cases at any rate, these objections proceeded from theories of the translator's function widely divergent from my own—theories of which nothing, probably, could disabuse the critic's mind, save a little experience of the difficulties of translating (as distinct from adapting) dramatic prose. Ibsen is at once extremely easy and extremely difficult to translate. It is extremely easy, in his prose plays, to realise his meaning; it is often extremely difficult to convey it in natural, colloquial, and yet not too colloquial, English. He is especially fond of

laying barbed-wire entanglements for the translator's feet, in the shape of recurrent phrases for which it is absolutely impossible to find an equivalent that will fit in all the different contexts. But this is only one of many classes of obstacles which encountered us on almost every page. I think, indeed, that my collaborators and I may take it as no small compliment that some of our critics have apparently not realised the difficulties of our task, or divined the laborious hours which have often gone to the turning of a single phrase. And, in not a few cases, the difficulties have proved sheer impossibilities. I will cite only one instance. Writing of *The Master Builder,* a very competent, and indeed generous, critic finds in it "a curious example of perhaps inevitable inadequacy. . . . 'Duty! Duty! Duty!' Hilda once exclaims in a scornful outburst. 'What a short, sharp, stinging word!' The epithets do not seem specially apt. But in the original she cries out 'Pligt! Pligt! Pligt!' and the very word stings and snaps." I submit that in this criticism there is one superfluous word—to wit, the "perhaps" which qualifies "inevitable." For the term used by Hilda, and for the idea in her mind, there is only one possible English equivalent: "Duty." The actress can speak it so as more or less to justify Hilda's feeling towards it; and, for the

rest, the audience must "piece out our imperfections with their thoughts" and assume that the Norwegian word has rather more of a sting in its sound. It might be possible, no doubt, to adapt Hilda's phrase to the English word, and say, "It sounds like the swish of a whip-lash," or something to that effect. But this is a sort of freedom which, rightly or wrongly, I hold inadmissible. Once grant the right of adaptation, even in small particulars, and it would be impossible to say where it should stop. The versions here presented (of the prose plays, at any rate) are translations, not paraphrases. If we have ever dropped into paraphrase, it is a dereliction of principle; and I do not remember an instance. For stage purposes, no doubt, a little paring of rough edges is here and there allowable; but even that, I think, should seldom go beyond the omission of lines which manifestly lose their force in translation, or are incomprehensible without a footnote.

In the Introductions to previous editions I have always confined myself to the statement of biographical and historic facts, holding criticism no part of my business. Now that Henrik Ibsen has passed away, and his works have taken a practically uncontested place in world-literature, this reticence seemed no longer imposed upon me. I have consequently made a few

critical remarks on each play, chiefly directed towards tracing the course of the poet's technical development. Nevertheless, the Introductions are still mainly biographical, and full advantage has been taken of the stores of new information contained in Ibsen's Letters, and in the books and articles about him that have appeared since his death. I have prefixed to *Lady Inger of Östråt* a sketch of the poet's life down to the date of that play; so that the Introductions, read in sequence, will be found to form a pretty full record of a career which, save for frequent changes of domicile, and the issuing of play after play, was singularly uneventful.

The Introductions to *Love's Comedy* and *Brand,* as well as the translations, are entirely the work of Professor Herford.

A point of typography perhaps deserves remark. The Norwegian (and German) method of indicating emphasis by spacing the letters of a word, thus, has been adopted in this edition. It is preferable for various reasons to the use of italics. In dramatic work, for one thing, emphases have sometimes to be indicated so frequently that the peppering of the page with italics would produce a very ugly effect. But a more important point is this: the italic fount suggests a stronger emphasis than the author,

as a rule, intends. The spacing of a word, especially if it be short, will often escape the eye which does not look very closely; and this is as it should be. Spacing, as Ibsen employs it, does not generally indicate any obtrusive stress, but is merely a guide to the reader in case a doubt should arise in his mind as to which of two words is intended to be the more emphatic. When such a doubt occurs, the reader, by looking closely at the text, will often find in the spacing an indication which may at first have escaped him. In almost all cases, a spaced word in the translation represents a spaced word in the original. I have very seldom used spacing to indicate an emphasis peculiar to the English phraseology. The system was first introduced in 1897, in the translation of *John Gabriel Borkman*. It has no longer even the disadvantage of unfamiliarity, since it has been adopted by Mr. Bernard Shaw in his printed plays, and, I believe, by other dramatists.

Just thirty years have passed since I first put pen to paper in a translation of Ibsen. In October 1877, *Pillars of Society* reached me hot from the press; and, having devoured it, I dashed off a translation of it in less than a week. It has since cost me five or six times as much work in revision as it originally did

in translation. The manuscript was punctually returned to me by more than one publisher; and something like ten years elapsed before it slowly dawned on me that the translating and editing of Ibsen's works was to be one of the chief labours, as it has certainly been one of the greatest privileges, of my life. Since 1887 or thereabouts, not many months have passed in which a considerable portion of my time has not been devoted to acting, in one form or another, as intermediary between Ibsen and the English-speaking public. The larger part of the work, in actual bulk, I have myself done; but I have had invaluable aid from many quarters, and not merely from those fellow-workers who are named in the following pages as the original translators of certain of the plays. These "helpers and servers," as Solness would say, are too many to be individually mentioned; but to all of them, and chiefly to one who has devoted to the service of Ibsen a good deal of the hard-won leisure of Indian official life, I hereby convey my heartfelt thanks.

The task is now ended. Though it has involved not a little sheer drudgery, it has, on the whole, been of absorbing interest. And I should have been ungrateful indeed had I shrunk from drudgery in the cause of an author who had meant so much to me. I have experienced no

other literary emotion at all comparable to the eagerness with which, ever since 1877, I awaited each new play of Ibsen's, or the excitement with which I tore off the wrapper of the postal packets in which the little paper-covered books arrived from Copenhagen. People who are old enough to remember the appearance of the monthly parts of *David Copperfield* or *Pendennis* may have some inkling of my sensations; but they were all the intenser as they recurred at intervals, not of one month, but of two years. And it was not Ibsen the man of ideas or doctrines that meant so much to me; it was Ibsen the pure poet, the creator of men and women, the searcher of hearts, the weaver of strange webs of destiny. I can only trust that, by diligence in seeking for the best interpretation of his thoughts, I have paid some part of my debt to that great spirit, and to the glorious country that gave him birth.

WILLIAM ARCHER.

LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT.

INTRODUCTION.*

Henrik Johan Ibsen was born on March 20, 1828, at the little seaport of Skien, situated at the head of a long fiord on the south coast of Norway. His great-great-grandfather was a Dane who settled in Bergen about 1720. His great-grandmother, Wenche Dischington, was the daughter of a Scotchman, who had settled and become naturalised in Norway; and Ibsen himself was inclined to ascribe some of his characteristics to the Scottish strain in his blood. Both his grandmother (Plesner by name) and his mother, Maria Cornelia Altenburg, were of German descent. It has been said that there was not a drop of Norwegian blood in Ibsen's composition; but it is doubtful whether this statement can be substantiated. Most of his male ancestors were sailors; but his father, Knud Ibsen, was a merchant. When Henrik (his first child) was born, he seems to have been prosperous, and to have led a very social and perhaps rather extravagant life. But when the poet was eight years old financial disaster overtook the family, and they had to withdraw to a comparatively small farmhouse on the

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outskirts of the little town, where they lived in poverty and retirement.

As a boy, Ibsen appears to have been lacking in animal spirits and the ordinary childish taste for games. Our chief glimpses of his home life are due to his sister Hedvig, the only one of his family with whom, in after years, he maintained any intercourse, and whose name he gave to one of his most beautiful creations.[1] She relates that the only out-door amusement he cared for was "building"—in what material does not appear. Among indoor diversions, that to which he was most addicted was conjuring, a younger brother serving as his confederate. We also hear of his cutting out fantastically-dressed figures in pasteboard, attaching them to wooden blocks, and ranging them in groups or tableaux. He may be said, in short, to have had a toy theatre without the stage. In all these amusements it is possible, with a little goodwill, to divine the coming dramatist—the constructive faculty, the taste for technical legerdemain (which made him in his youth so apt a disciple of Scribe), and the fundamental passion for manipulating fictitious characters. The education he received was of the most ordinary, but included a little Latin. The subjects which chiefly interested him were history and religion. He showed no special literary proclivities, though a dream which he narrated in a school composition so impressed his master that he accused him (much to the boy's indignation) of having copied it out of some book.

His chief taste was for drawing, and he was anxious to become an artist, but his father could

[1] See Introduction to *The Wild Duck*, p. xxiii.

not afford to pay for his training.[1] At the age of fifteen, therefore, he had to set about earning his living, and was apprenticed to an apothecary in Grimstad, a town on the south-west coast of Norway, between Arendal and Christianssand. He was here in even narrower social surroundings than at Skien. His birthplace numbered some 3000 inhabitants, Grimstad about 800. That he was contented with his lot cannot be supposed; and the short, dark, taciturn youth seems to have made an unsympathetic and rather uncanny impression upon the burghers of the little township. His popularity was not heightened by a talent which he presently developed for drawing caricatures and writing personal lampoons. He found, however, two admiring friends in Christopher Lorentz Due, a custom-house clerk, and a law student named Olë Schulerud.

The first political event which aroused his interest and stirred him to literary expression was the French Revolution of 1848. He himself writes:[2] "The times were much disturbed. The February revolution, the rising in Hungary and elsewhere, the Slesvig War—all this had a strong and ripening effect on my development, immature though it remained both then and long afterwards. I wrote clangorous poems of encouragement to the Magyars, adjuring them, for the sake of freedom and humanity, not to falter in their righteous war against 'the tyrants'; and I composed a long series of sonnets to King Oscar, mainly, so far as I remember, urging him to set

[1] He continued to dabble in painting until he was thirty, or thereabouts.

[2] Preface to the second edition of *Catilina*, 1875.

aside all petty considerations, and march without delay, at the head of his army, to the assistance of our Danish brothers on the Slesvig frontier." These effusions remained in manuscript, and have, for the most part, perished. About the same time he was reading for his matriculation examination at Christiania University, where he proposed to study medicine; and it happened that the Latin books prescribed were Sallust's *Catiline* and Cicero's Catilinarian Orations. "I devoured these documents," says Ibsen, "and a few months later my drama [*Catilina*] was finished." His friend Schulerud took it to Christiania, to offer it to the theatre and to the publishers. By both it was declined. Schulerud, however, had it printed at his own expense; and soon after its appearance, in the early spring of 1850, Ibsen himself came to Christiania.[1]

For the most part written in blank verse, *Catilina* towards the close breaks into rhyming trochaic lines of thirteen and fifteen syllables. It is an extremely youthful production, very interesting from the biographical point of view, but of small substantive merit. What is chiefly notable in it, perhaps, is the fact that it already shows Ibsen occupied with the theme which was to run through so many of his works—the contrast between two types of womanhood, one strong and resolute, even to criminality, the other comparatively weak, clinging, and "feminine" in the conventional sense of the word.

In Christiania Ibsen shared Schulerud's lodg-

[1] This is his own statement of the order of events. According to Halvdan Koht (*Samlede Værker*, vol. x. p. i.) he arrived in Christiania in March, 1850, and *Catilina* did not appear until April.

ings, and his poverty. There is a significant sentence in his preface to the re-written *Catilina*, in which he tells how the bulk of the first edition was sold as waste paper, and adds: "In the days immediately following we lacked none of the first necessities of life." He went to a "student-factory," or, as we should say, a "crammer's," managed by one Heltberg; and there he fell in with several of the leading spirits of his generation—notably with Björnson, A. O. Vinje, and Jonas Lie. In the early summer of 1850 he wrote a one-act play, *Kiæmpehöien* (*The Warrior's Barrow*), entirely in the sentimental and somewhat verbose manner of the Danish poet Oehlenschläger. It was accepted by the Christiania Theatre, and performed three times, but cannot have put much money in the poet's purse. With Paul Botten-Hansen and A. O. Vinje he co-operated in the production of a weekly satirical paper, at first entitled *Manden* (*The Man*), but afterwards *Andhrimner*, after the cook of the gods in Valhalla. To this journal, which lasted only from January to September, 1851, he contributed, among other things, a satirical "music-tragedy," entitled *Norma, or a Politician's Love*. As the circulation of the paper is said to have been something under a hundred, it cannot have paid its contributors very lavishly. About this time, too, he narrowly escaped arrest on account of some political agitation, in which, however, he had not been very deeply concerned.

Meanwhile a movement had been going forward in the capital of Western Norway, Bergen, which was to have a determining influence on Ibsen's destinies.

Up to 1850 there had been practically no Norwegian drama. The two great poets of the first half of the century, Wergeland and Welhaven, had nothing dramatic in their composition, though Wergeland more than once essayed the dramatic form. Danish actors and Danish plays held entire possession of the Christiania Theatre; and, though amateur performances were not uncommon in provincial towns, it was generally held that the Norwegians, as a nation, were devoid of all talent for acting. The very sound of Norwegian (as distinct from Danish) was held by Norwegians themselves to be ridiculous on the stage. Fortunately Olë Bull, the great violinist, was not of that opinion. With the insight of genius, he saw that the time had come for the development of a national drama; he set forth this view in a masterly argument addressed to the Storthing; and he gave practical effect to it by establishing, at his own risk, a Norwegian Theatre in Bergen. How rightly he had judged the situation may be estimated from the fact that among the raw lads who first presented themselves for employment was Johannes Brun, afterwards one of the greatest of comedians; while the first "theatre-poet" engaged by the management was none other than Henrik Ibsen.

The theatre was opened on January 2, 1850; Ibsen entered upon his duties (at a salary of less than £70 a year) in November, 1851.[1]

Incredibly, pathetically small, according to our

[1] The history of Ibsen's connection with the Bergen Theatre is written at some length in an article by me, entitled "Ibsen's Apprenticeship," published in the *Fortnightly Review* for January, 1904. From that article I quote freely in the following pages.

ideas, were the material resources of Bull's gallant enterprise. The town of Bergen numbered only 25,000 inhabitants. Performances were given only twice, or, at the outside, three times, a week; and the highest price of admission was two shillings. What can have been attempted in the way of scenery of costumes it is hard to imagine. Of a three-act play, produced in 1852, we read that "the mounting, which cost £22 10*s*., left nothing to be desired."

Ibsen's connection with the Bergen Theatre lasted from November 6, 1851, until the summer of 1857—that is to say, from his twenty-fourth to his thirtieth year. He was engaged in the first instance "to assist the theatre as dramatic author," but in the following year he received from the management a "travelling stipend" of £45 to enable him to study the art of theatrical production in Denmark and Germany, with the stipulation that, on his return, he should undertake the duties of "scene instructor"—that is to say, stage-manager or producer. In this function he seems to have been—as, indeed, he always was—extremely conscientious. A book exists in the Bergen Public Library containing (it is said) careful designs by him for every scene in the plays he produced, and full notes as to entrances, exits, groupings, costumes, accessories, &c. But he was not an animating or inspiring producer. He had none of the histrionic vividness of his successor in the post, Björnstjerne Björnson, who, like all great producers, could not only tell the actors what to do, but show them how to do it. Perhaps it was a sense of his lack of impulse that induced the management to give him a col-

league, one Herman Låding, with whom his relations were none of the happiest. Ibsen is even said, on one occasion, to have challenged Låding to a duel.

One of the duties of the "theatre-poet" was to have a new play ready for each recurrence of the "Foundation Day" of the theatre, January 2. On that date, in 1853, Ibsen produced a romantic comedy, *St. John's Night*. This is the only one of his plays that has never been printed. From the accounts of those who have seen the manuscript, it would appear to be a strange jumble of fantastic fairy-lore with modern comedy or melodrama. Perhaps it is not quite fanciful to regard it as a sort of half-way house between *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Peer Gynt*. In one of its scenes there appears to be an unmistakable foreshadowing of the episode in the Troll-King's palace (*Peer Gynt*, Act II., Sc. 6). The play had no success, and was performed only twice. For the next Foundation Day, January 2, 1854, Ibsen prepared a revised version of *The Warrior's Barrow*, already produced in Christiania. A year later, January 2, 1855, *Lady Inger of Östrât* was produced—a work still immature, indeed, but giving, for the first time, no uncertain promise of the master dramatist to come.

In an autobiographical letter to the Danish critic, Peter Hansen, written from Dresden in 1870, Ibsen says: "*Lady Inger of Östrât* is the result of a love-affair—hastily entered into and violently broken off—to which several of my minor poems may also be attributed, such as

Wild-flowers and Pot-plants, A Bird-Song, &c." The heroine of this love-affair can now be identified as a lady named Henrikke Holst, who seems to have preserved through a long life the fresh, bright spirit, the overflowing joyousness, which attracted Ibsen when she was only in her seventeenth year. Their relation was of the most innocent. It went no further than a few surreptitious rambles in the romantic surroundings of Bergen, usually with a somewhat older girl to play propriety, and with a bag of sugar-plums to fill up pauses in the conversation. The "violent" ending seems to have come when the young lady's father discovered the secret of these excursions, and doubtless placed her under more careful control. What there was in this episode to suggest, or in any way influence, *Lady Inger,* I cannot understand. Nevertheless the identification seems quite certain. The affair had a charming little sequel. During the days of their love's young dream, Ibsen treated the "wild-flower" with a sort of shy and distant chivalry at which the wood-gods must have smiled. He avoided even touching her hand, and always addressed her by the "De" (you) of formal politeness. But when they met again after many years, he a famous poet and she a middle-aged matron, he instinctively adopted the "Du" (thou) of affectionate intimacy, and she responded in kind. He asked her whether she had recognised herself in any of his works, and she replied: "I really don't know, unless it be in the parson's wife in *Love's Comedy,* with her eight children and her perpetual knitting." "Ibsen protested," says Herr Paulsen, in whose *Samliv med Ibsen* a full ac-

count of the episode may be read. It is interesting to note that the lady did not recognise herself in Eline Gyldenlöve, any more than we can.

It must have been less than a year after the production of *Lady Inger* that Ibsen made the acquaintance of the lady who was to be his wife. Susanna Dåe Thoresen was a daughter (by his second marriage) of Provost[1] Thoresen, of Bergen, whose third wife, Magdalene Krag, afterwards became an authoress of some celebrity. It is recorded that Ibsen's first visit to the Thoresen household took place on January 7, 1856,[2] and that on that occasion, speakng to Susanna Thoresen, he was suddenly moved to say to her: "You are now Elina, but in time you will become Lady Inger." Twenty years later, at Christmas, 1876, he gave his wife a copy of the German translation of *Lady Inger*, with the following inscription on the fly-leaf:

> "This book is by right indefeasible thine,
> Who in spirit art born of the Östråt line."

In *Lady Inger* Ibsen has chosen a theme from the very darkest hour of Norwegian history. King Sverre's democratic monarchy, dating from

[1] Provost ("Provst") is an ecclesiastical title, roughly equivalent to Dean.

[2] See article by Dr. Julius Elias in *Die neue Rundschau*, December, 1906, p. 1463. Dr. Brahm, in the same magazine (p. 1414), writes as though this were Ibsen's first meeting with his wife; and a note by Halvdan Koht, in the Norwegian edition of Ibsen's Letters, seems to bear out this view. But it would appear that what Fru Ibsen told Dr. Elias was that on the date mentioned Ibsen for "the first time visited at her father's house." The terms of the anecdote almost compel us to assume that he had previously met her elsewhere. It seems almost inconceivable that Ibsen, of all people, should have made such a speech to a lady on their very first meeting.

the beginning of the thirteenth century, had paralysed the old Norwegian nobility. One by one the great families died out, their possessions being concentrated in the hands of the few survivors, who regarded their wealth as a privilege unhampered by obligations. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, then, patriotism and public spirit were almost dead among the nobles, while the monarchy, before which the old aristocracy had fallen, was itself dead, or rather merged (since 1380) in the Crown of Denmark. The peasantry, too, had long ago lost all effective voice in political affairs; so that Norway lay prone and inert at the mercy of her Danish rulers. It is at the moment of deepest national degradation that Ibsen has placed his tragedy; and the degradation was, in fact, even deeper than he represents it, for the longings for freedom, the stirrings of revolt, which form the motive-power of the action, are invented, or at any rate idealised, by the poet. Fru Inger Ottisdatter Gyldenlöve was, in fact, the greatest personage of her day in Norway. She was the best-born, the wealthiest, and probably the ablest woman in the land. At the time when Ibsen wrote, little more than this seems to have been known of her; so that in making her the victim of a struggle between patriotic duty and maternal love, he was perhaps poetising in the absence of positive evidence, rather than in opposition to it. Subsequent research, unfortunately, has shown that Fru Inger was but little troubled with patriotic aspirations. She was a hard and grasping woman, ambitious of social power and predominance, but inaccessible, or nearly so, to

national feeling. It was from sheer social ambition, and with no qualms of patriotic conscience, that she married her daughters to Danish noblemen. True, she lent some support to the insurrection of the so-called "Dale-junker," a peasant who gave himself out as the heir of Sten Sture, a former regent of Sweden; but there is not a tittle of ground for making this pretender her son. He might, indeed, have become her son-in-law, for, speculating on his chances of success, she had betrothed one of her daughters to him. Thus the Fru Inger of Ibsen's play is, in her character and circumstances, as much a creation of the poet's as though no historic personage of that name had ever existed. Olaf Skaktavl, Nils Lykke, and Eline Gyldenlöve are also historic names; but with them, too, Ibsen has dealt with the utmost freedom. The real Nils Lykke was married in 1528 to the real Eline Gyldenlöve. She died four years later, leaving him two children; and thereupon he would fain have married her sister Lucia. Such a union, however, was regarded as incestuous, and the lovers failed in their effort to obtain a special dispensation. Lucia then became her brother-in-law's mistress, and bore him a son. But the ecclesiastical law was in those days not to be trifled with; Nils Lykke was thrown into prison for his crime, condemned, and killed in his dungeon, in the year of grace 1535. Thus there was a tragedy ready-made in Ibsen's material, though it was not the tragedy he chose to write.

The Bergen public did not greatly take to *Lady Inger*, and it was performed, in its novelty, only

twice. Nor is the reason far to seek. The extreme complexity of the intrigue, and the lack of clear guidance through its mazes, probably left the Bergen audiences no less puzzled than the London audiences who saw the play at the Scala Theatre in 1906.[1] It is a play which can be appreciated only by spectators who know it beforehand. Such audiences it has often found in Norway, where it was revived at the Christiania Theatre in 1875; but in Denmark and Germany, though it has been produced several times, it has never been very successful. We need go no further than the end of the first act to understand the reason. On an audience which knows nothing of the play, the sudden appearance of a "Stranger," to whose identity it has not the slightest clue, can produce no effect save one of bewilderment. To rely on such an incident for what was evidently intended to be a thrilling "curtain," was to betray extreme inexperience; and this single trait is typical of much in the play. Nevertheless *Lady Inger* marks a decisive advance in Ibsen's development. It marks, one may say, the birth of his power of invention. He did not as yet know how to restrain or clarify his invention, and he made clumsy use of the stock devices of a bad school. But he had once for all entered upon that course of technical training which it took him five-and-twenty years to complete. He was learning much that he was afterwards to unlearn; but had he

[1] Stage Society performances, January 28 and 29, 1906. Lady Inger was played by Miss Edyth Olive, Elina by Miss Alice Crawford, Nils Lykke by Mr. Henry Ainley, Olaf Skaktavl by Mr. Alfred Brydone, and Nils Stenssön by Mr. Harcourt Williams.

not undergone this apprenticeship, he would never have been the master he ultimately became.

When Ibsen entered upon his duties at the Bergen Theatre, the influence of Eugène Scribe and his imitators was at its very height. Of the 145 plays produced during his tenure of office, more than half (seventy-five) were French, twenty-one being by Scribe himself, and at least half the remainder by adepts of his school, Bayard, Dumanoir, Mélesville, &c. It is to this school that Ibsen, in *Lady Inger*, proclaims his adherence; and he did not finally shake off its influence until he wrote the Third Act of *A Doll's House* in 1879. Although the romantic environment of the play, and the tragic intensity of the leading character, tend to disguise the relationship, there can be no doubt that *Lady Inger* is, in essence, simply a French drama of intrigue, constructed after the method of Scribe, as exemplified in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *Les Contes de la Reine de Navarre*,[1] and a dozen other French plays, with the staging of which the poet was then occupied. It might seem that the figure of Elina, brooding over the thought of her dead sister, coffined in the vault below the banqueting-hall, belonged rather to German romanticism; but there are plenty of traces of German romanticism even in the French plays with which the good people of Bergen were regaled. For the suggestion of grave-vaults and coffined heroines, for example, Ibsen need have gone no further than Dumas's *Catherine Howard*, which he produced

[1] These two plays were produced, respectively, in March and October, 1854, at the very time when Ibsen must have been planning and composing *Lady Inger*.

in March, 1853. I do not, however, pretend that his romantic colouring came to him from France. It came to him, doubtless, from Germany, by way of Denmark. My point is that the conduct of the intrigue in *Lady Inger* shows the most unmistakable marks of his study of the great French plot-manipulators. Its dexterity and its artificiality alike are neither German nor Danish, but French. Ibsen had learnt the great secret of Scribe—the secret of dramatic movement. The play is full of those ingenious complications, mistakes of identity, and rapid turns of fortune by which Scribe enchained the interest of his audiences. Its central theme—a mother plunging into intrigue and crime for the advancement of her son, only to find that her son himself has been her victim—is as old as Greek tragedy. The secondary story, too—that of Elina's wild infatuation for the betrayer and practically the murderer of her sister—could probably be paralleled in the ballad literature of Scotland, Germany, or Denmark, and might, indeed, have been told, in verse or prose, by Sir Walter Scott. But these very un-Parisian elements are handled in a fundamentally Parisian fashion, and Ibsen is clearly fascinated, for the time, by the ideal of what was afterwards to be known as the "well-made play." The fact that the result is in reality an ill-made play in no way invalidates this theory. It is perhaps the final condemnation of the well-made play that in nine cases out of ten—and even in the hands of far more experienced playwrights than the young Bergen "theatre-poet"—it is apt to prove ill-made after all.

Far be it from me, however, to speak in pure

disparagement of *Lady Inger*. With all its defects, it seems to me manifestly the work of a great poet—the only one of Ibsen's plays prior to *The Vikings at Helgeland* of which this can be said. It may be that early impressions mislead me; but I still cannot help seeing in Lady Inger a figure of truly tragic grandeur; in Nils Lykke one of the few really seductive seducers in literature; and in many passages of the dialogue, the touch of a master hand.

W. A.

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG.

INTRODUCTION.*

Exactly a year after the production of *Lady Inger of Östrât*—that is to say on the "Foundation Day" of the Bergen Theatre, January 2, 1856—*The Feast at Solhoug* was produced. The poet himself has written its history in full in the Preface to the second edition (see p. 183). The only comment that need be made upon his rejoinder to his critics has been made, with perfect fairness as it seems to me, by George Brandes in the following passage:[1] "No one who is unacquainted with the Scandinavian languages can fully understand the charm that the style and melody of the old ballads exercise upon the Scandinavian mind. The beautiful ballads and songs of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* have perhaps had a similar power over German minds; but, as far as I am aware, no German poet has ever succeeded in inventing a metre suitable for dramatic purposes, which yet retained the mediæval ballad's sonorous swing and rich aroma. The explanation of the powerful impression produced

[1] *Ibsen and Björnson.* London, Heinemann, 1899, p. 88.

* Copyright, 1908, by Charles Scribner's Sons.

in its day by Henrik Hertz's *Svend Dyring's House* is to be found in the fact that in it, for the first time, the problem was solved of how to fashion a metre akin to that of the heroic ballads, a metre possessing as great mobility as the verse of the *Niebelungenlied*, along with a dramatic value not inferior to that of the iambic pentameter. Henrik Ibsen, it is true, has justly pointed out that, as regards the mutual relations of the principal characters, *Svend Dyring's House* owes more to Kleist's *Käthchen von Heilbronn* than *The Feast at Solhoug* owes to *Svend Dyring's House*. But the fact remains that the versified parts of the dialogue of both *The Feast at Solhoug* and *Olaf Liliekrans* are written in that imitation of the tone and style of the heroic ballad, of which Hertz was the happily-inspired originator. There seems to me to be no depreciation whatever of Ibsen in the assertion of Hertz's right to rank as his model. Even the greatest must have learnt from some one."

The question is, to put it in a nutshell: Supposing Hertz had never adapted the ballad measures to dramatic purposes, would Ibsen have written *The Feast at Solhoug*, at any rate in its present form? I think we must answer: Almost certainly, no.

But while the influence of Danish lyrical romanticism is apparent in the style of the play, the structure, as it seems to me, shows no less clearly that influence of the French plot-manipulators which we found so unmistakably at work in *Lady Inger*. Despite its lyrical dialogue, *The Feast at Solhoug* has that crispiness of dramatic action which marks the French plays

of the period. It may indeed be called Scribe's *Bataille de Dames* writ tragic. Here, as in the *Bataille de Dames* (one of the earliest plays produced under Ibsen's supervision), we have the rivalry of an older and a younger woman for the love of a man who is proscribed on an unjust accusation, and pursued by the emissaries of the royal power. One might even, though this would be forcing the point, find an analogy in the fact that the elder woman (in both plays a strong and determined character) has in Scribe's comedy a cowardly suitor, while in Ibsen's tragedy, or melodrama, she has a cowardly husband. In every other respect the plays are as dissimilar as possible; yet it seems to me far from unlikely that an unconscious reminiscence of the *Bataille de Dames* may have contributed to the shaping of *The Feast at Solhoug* in Ibsen's mind. But more significant than any resemblance of theme is the similarity of Ibsen's whole method to that of the French school—the way, for instance, in which misunderstandings are kept up through a careful avoidance of the use of proper names, and the way in which a cup of poison, prepared for one person, comes into the hands of another person, is, as a matter of fact, drunk by no one, but occasions the acutest agony to the would-be poisoner. All this ingenious dovetailing of incidents and working-up of misunderstandings, Ibsen unquestionably learned from the French. The French language, indeed, is the only one which has a word—*quiproquo*—to indicate the class of misunderstanding which, from *Lady Inger* down to *The League of Youth*, Ibsen employed without scruple.

Ibsen's first visit to the home of his future wife took place five days after the production of *The Feast at Solhoug*. It seems doubtful whether this was actually his first meeting with her;[1] but at any rate we can scarcely suppose that he knew her during the previous summer, when he was writing his play. It is a curious coincidence, then, that he should have found in Susanna Thoresen and her sister Marie very much the same contrast of characters which had occupied him in his first dramatic effort, *Catilina*, and which had formed the main subject of the play he had just produced. It is less wonderful that the same contrast should so often recur in his later works, even down to *John Gabriel Borkman*. Ibsen was greatly attached to his gentle and retiring sister-in-law, who died unmarried in 1874.

The Feast at Solhoug has been translated by Miss Morison and myself, only because no one else could be found to undertake the task. We have done our best; but neither of us lays claim to any great metrical skill, and the light movement of Ibsen's verse is often, if not always, rendered in a sadly halting fashion. It is, however, impossible to exaggerate the irregularity of the verse in the original, or its defiance of strict metrical law. The normal line is one of four accents; but when this is said, it is almost impossible to arrive at any further generalisation. There is a certain lilting melody in many passages, and the whole play has not unfairly been said to possess the charm of a northern sum-

[1] See note, p. xxvi.

mer night, in which the glimmer of twilight gives place only to the gleam of morning. But in the main (though much better than its successor, *Olaf Liliekrans*) it is the weakest thing that Ibsen admitted into the canon of his works. He wrote it in 1870 as "a study which I now disown"; and had he continued in that frame of mind, the world would scarcely have quarrelled with his judgment. At worst, then, my collaborator and I cannot be accused of marring a masterpiece; but for which assurance we should probably have shrunk from the attempt.

W. A.

LOVE'S COMEDY.

INTRODUCTION.

Kærlighedens Komedie was published at Christiania in 1862. The polite world—so far as such a thing existed at that time in the Northern capital—received it with an outburst of indignation not now entirely easy to understand. It has indeed faults enough. The character-drawing is often crude, the action, though full of effective by-play, extremely slight, and the sensational climax has little relation to human nature as exhibited in Norway, or out of it, at that or any other time. But the sting lay in the unflattering veracity of the piece as a whole; in the merciless portrayal of the trivialities of persons, or classes, high in their own esteem; in the unexampled effrontery of bringing a clergyman upon the stage. All these have long since passed in Scandinavia, into the category of the things which people take with their Ibsen as a matter of course, and the play is welcomed with delight by every Scandinavian audience. But in 1862 the matter was serious, and Ibsen meant it to be so.

For they were years of ferment—those six or

seven which intervened between his return to Christiania from Bergen in 1857, and his departure for Italy in 1864. As director of the newly founded "Norwegian Theatre," Ibsen was a prominent member of the little knot of brilliant young writers who led the nationalist revolt against Danish literary tradition, then still dominant in well-to-do, and especially in official, Christiania. Well-to-do and official Christiania met the revolt with contempt. Under such conditions, the specific literary battle of the Norwegian with the Dane easily developed into the eternal warfare of youthful idealism with "respectability" and convention. Ibsen had already started work upon the greatest of his Norse Histories—*The Pretenders*. But history was for him little more than material for the illustration of modern problems; and he turned with zest from the task of breathing his own spirit into the stubborn mould of the thirteenth century, to hold up the satiric mirror to the suburban drawing-rooms of Christiania, and to the varied phenomena current there,—and in suburban drawing-rooms elsewhere,—under the name of Love.

Yet *Love's Comedy* is much more than a satire, and its exuberant humour has a bitter core; the laughter that rings through it is the harsh, implacable laughter of Carlyle. His criticism of commonplace love-making is at first sight harmless and ordinary enough. The ceremonial formalities of the continental *Verlobung*, the shrill raptures of aunts and cousins over the engaged pair, the satisfied smile of enterprising materfamilias as she reckons up the tale of daughters or of nieces safely married off under her aus-

pices; or, again, the embarrassments incident to a prolonged *Brautstand* following a hasty wooing, the deadly effect of familiarity upon a shallow affection, and the anxious efforts to save the appearance of romance when its zest has departed—all these things had yielded such "comedy" as they possess to many others before Ibsen, and an Ibsen was not needed to evoke it. But if we ask what, then, is the right way from which these "cosmic" personages in their several fashions diverge; what is the condition which will secure courtship from ridicule, and marriage from disillusion, Ibsen abruptly parts company with all his predecessors. "'Of course,' reply the rest in chorus, 'a deep and sincere love';—'together,' add some, 'with prudent good sense.'" The prudent good sense Ibsen allows; but he couples with it the startling paradox that the first condition of a happy marriage is the absence of love, and the first condition of an enduring love the absence of marriage.

The student of the latter-day Ibsen is naturally somewhat taken aback to find the grim poet of Doubt, whose task it seems to be to apply a corrosive criticism to modern institutions in general and to marriage in particular, gravely defending the "marriage of convenience." And his amazement is not diminished by the sense that the author of this plea for the loveless marriage, which poets have at all times scorned and derided, was himself beyond question a poet, ardent, brilliant, and young, and himself, what is more, quite recently and beyond question happily, married. The truth is that there are two men in Ibsen—an idealist, exalted to the verge

of sentimentality, and a critic, hard, inexorable, remorseless, to the verge of cynicism. What we call his "social philosophy" is a *modus vivendi* arrived at between them. Both agree in repudiating "marriage for love"; but the idealist repudiates it in the name of love, the critic in the name of marriage. Love, for the idealist Ibsen, is a passion which loses its virtue when it reaches its goal, which inspires only while it aspires, and flags bewildered when it attains. Marriage, for the critic Ibsen, is an institution beset with pitfalls into which those are surest to step who enter it blinded with love. In the latter dramas the tragedy of married life is commonly generated by other forms of blindness—the childish innocence of Nora, the maidenly ignorance of Helena Alving, neither of whom married precisely "for love"; here it is blind Love alone who, to the jealous eye of the critic, plays the part of the Serpent in the Edens of wedded bliss. There is, it is clear, an element of unsolved contradiction in Ibsen's thought;—Love is at once so precious and so deadly, a possession so glorious that all other things in life are of less worth, and yet capable of producing only disastrously illusive effects upon those who have entered into the relations to which it prompts. But with Ibsen—and it is a grave intellectual defect—there is an absolute antagonism between spirit and form. An institution is always with him, a shackle for the free life of souls, not an organ through which they attain expression; and since the institution of marriage cannot but be, there remains as the only logical solution that which he enjoins—to keep the

soul's life out of it. To "those about to marry," Ibsen therefore says in effect, "Be sure you are not in love!" And to those who are in love he says, "Part!"

It is easy to understand the irony with which a man who thought thus of love contemplated the business of "love-making," and the ceremonial discipline of Continental courtship. The whole unnumbered tribe of wooing and plighted lovers were for him unconscious actors in a world-comedy of Love's contriving—naïve fools of fancy, passionately weaving the cords that are to strangle passion. Comedy like this cannot be altogether gay; and as each fresh romance decays into routine, and each aspiring passion goes out under the spell of a vulgar environment, or submits to the bitter salvation of a final parting, the ringing laughter grows harsh and hollow, and notes of ineffable sadness escape from the poet's Stoic self-restraint.

Ibsen had grown up in a school which cultivated the romantic, piquant, picturesque in style; which ran riot in wit, in vivacious and brilliant imagery, in resonant rhythms and telling double rhymes. It must be owned that this was not the happiest school for a dramatist, nor can *Love's Comedy* be regarded, in the matter of style, as other than a risky experiment which nothing but the sheer dramatic force of an Ibsen could have carried through. As it is, there are palpable fluctuations, discrepancies of manner; the realism of treatment often provokes a realism of style out of keeping with the lyric afflatus of the verse; and we pass with little warning from the barest colloquial prose to strains of

high-wrought poetic fancy. Nevertheless, the style, with all its inequalities, becomes in Ibsen's hands a singularly plastic medium of dramatic expression. The marble is too richly veined for ideal sculpture, but it takes the print of life. The wit, exuberant as it is, does not coruscate indiscriminately upon all lips; and it has many shades and varieties—caustic, ironical, imaginative, playful, passionate—which take their temper from the speaker's mood.

The present version of the play retains the metres of the original, and follows it in general line for line. For a long passage, occupying substantially the first twenty pages, the translator is indebted to the editor of the present work; and two other passages—Falk's tirades on pp. 58 and 100—result from a fusion of versions made independently by us both.

C. H. H.

LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT

(1855)

CHARACTERS

LADY INGER OTTISDAUGHTER RÖMER, *widow of High Steward Nils Gyldenlöve.*
ELINA GYLDENLÖVE, *her daughter.*
NILS LYKKE, *Danish knight and councillor.*
OLAF SKAKTAVL, *an outlawed Norwegian noble.*
NILS STENSSON.
JENS BIELKE, *Swedish commander.*
BIÖRN, *majordomo at Östråt.*
FINN, *a servant.*
EINAR HUK, *bailiff at Östråt.*
Servants, peasants, and Swedish men-at-arms.

The action takes place at Östrat Manor, on the Trondhiem Fiord, in the year 1528.

[PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES.—Östråt = *Östrot;* Elina (Norwegian, Eline) = *Eleena;* Stensson = *Staynson;* Biörn = *Byörn;* Jens Bielke = *Yens Byelke;* Huk = *Hook.* The *g*'s in "Inger" and in "Gyldenlöve" are, of course, hard. The final *e*'s and the *ö*'s pronounced much as in German.]

LADY INGER OF ÖSTRÅT

DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

ACT FIRST

A room at Östråt. Through an open door in the back, the Banquet Hall is seen in faint moonlight, which shines fitfully through a deep bow-window in the opposite wall. To the right, an entrance-door; further forward, a curtained window. On the left, a door leading to the inner rooms; further forward a large open fireplace, which casts a glow over the room. It is a stormy evening.

BIÖRN *and* FINN *are sitting by the fireplace. The latter is occupied in polishing a helmet. Several pieces of armour lie near them, along with a sword and shield.*

FINN.

[*After a pause.*] Who was Knut[1] Alfson?

BIÖRN.

My Lady says he was the last of Norway's knighthood.

[1] Pronounce *Knoot.*

FINN.

And the Danes killed him at Oslo-fiord?

BIÖRN.

If you know not that, ask any child of five.

FINN.

So Knut Alfson was the last of our knighthood? And now he's dead and gone! [*Holds up the helmet.*] Well, thou must e'en be content to hang scoured and bright in the Banquet Hall; for what art thou now but an empty nutshell? The kernel—the worms have eaten that many a winter agone.

What say you, Biörn—may not one call Norway's land an empty nut-shell, even like the helmet here; bright without, worm-eaten within?

BIÖRN.

Hold your peace, and mind your task!—Is the helmet ready?

FINN.

It shines like silver in the moonlight.

BIÖRN.

Then put it by.—See here; scrape the rust off the sword.

FINN.

[*Turning the sword over and examining it.*] Is it worth while?

BIÖRN.

What mean you?

FINN.

The edge is gone.

BIÖRN.

What's that to you? Give it me.—Here, take the shield.

FINN.

[*As before.*] There is no grip to it!

BIÖRN.

[*Mutters.*] Let me get a grip on you——

[FINN *hums to himself for a while.*

BIÖRN.

What now?

FINN.

An empty helmet, a sword with no edge, a shield with no grip—so it has all come to that. Who can blame Lady Inger if she leaves such weapons to hang scoured and polished on the walls, instead of rusting them in Danish blood?

BIÖRN.

Folly! Is there not peace in the land?

FINN.

Peace? Ay, when the peasant has shot away his last arrow, and the wolf has reft the last lamb from the fold, then is there peace between them. But 'tis a strange friendship. Well, well; let that pass. 'Tis fitting, as I said, that the harness hang bright in the hall; for you know

the old saw: "Call none a man but the knightly man." So now that we have never a knight in the land, we have never a man; and where no man is, there must women order things; therefore——

BIÖRN.

Therefore—therefore I bid you hold your foul prate! [*Rises.*
The evening wears on. Enough; you may hang the helmet and armour in the hall again.

FINN.

[*In a low voice.*] Nay, best let it be till to-morrow.

BIÖRN.

What, do you fear the dark?

FINN.

Not by day. And if so be I fear it at even, I am not the only one. Ah, you may look; I tell you in the housefolk's room there is talk of many things. [*Lower.*] They say that, night by night, a tall figure, clad in black, walks the Banquet Hall.

BIÖRN.

Old wives' tales!

FINN.

Ah, but they all swear 'tis true.

BIÖRN.

That I well believe.

FINN.

The strangest of all is that Lady Inger thinks the same——

BIÖRN.

[*Starting.*] Lady Inger? What does she think?

FINN.

What Lady Inger thinks? I warrant few can tell that. But sure it is that she has no rest in her. See you not how day by day she grows thinner and paler? [*Looks keenly at him.*] They say she never sleeps—and that it is because of the black figure——

[*While he is speaking,* ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *has appeared in the half-open door on the left. She stops and listens, unobserved.*

BIÖRN.

And you believe such follies?

FINN.

Well, half and half. There be folk, too, that read things another way. But that is pure malice, I'll be bound.—Hearken, Biörn—know you the song that is going round the country?

BIÖRN.

A song?

FINN.

Ay, 'tis on all folks' lips. 'Tis a shameful scurril thing, for sure; yet it goes prettily. Just listen: [*Sings in a low voice.*

Dame Inger sitteth in Östråt fair,
She wraps her in costly furs—
She decks her in velvet and ermine and vair,
Red gold are the beads that she twines in her hair—
But small peace in that soul of hers.

Dame Inger hath sold her to Denmark's lord.
She bringeth her folk 'neath the stranger's yoke—
In guerdon whereof—

[BIÖRN *enraged, seizes him by the throat.* ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *withdraws without having been seen.*

BIÖRN.

I will send you guerdonless to the foul fiend, if you prate of Lady Inger but one unseemly word more.

FINN.

[*Breaking from his grasp.*] Why—did *I* make the song?

[*The blast of a horn is heard from the right.*

BIÖRN.

Hark—what is that?

FINN.

A horn. Then there come guests to-night.

BIÖRN.

[*At the window.*] They are opening the gate. I hear the clatter of hoofs in the courtyard. It must be a knight.

FINN.

A knight? Nay, that can scarce be.

BIÖRN.

Why not?

FINN.

Did you not say yourself: the last of our knighthood is dead and gone?

[*Goes out to the right.*

BIÖRN.

The accursed knave, with his prying and peering! What avails all my striving to hide and hush things? They whisper of her even now—; soon all men will be shouting aloud that——

ELINA.

[*Comes in again through the door on the left; looks round her, and says with suppressed emotion:*] Are you alone, Biörn?

BIÖRN.

Is it you, Mistress Elina?

ELINA.

Come, Biörn, tell me one of your stories; I know you can tell others than those that——

BIÖRN.

A story? Now—so late in the evening——?

ELINA.

If you count from the time when it grew dark at Östråt, then 'tis late indeed.

BIÖRN.

What ails you? Has aught crossed you? You seem so restless.

ELINA.

May be so.

BIÖRN.

There is something amiss. I have hardly known you this half year past.

ELINA.

Bethink you: this half year past my dearest sister Lucia has been sleeping in the vault below.

BIÖRN.

That is not all, Mistress Elina—it is not that alone that makes you now thoughtful and white and silent, now restless and ill at ease, as you are to-night.

ELINA.

Not that alone, you think? And wherefore not? Was she not gentle and pure and fair as a summer night? Biörn,—I tell you, Lucia was dear to me as my life. Have you forgotten how many a time, when we were children, we sat on your knee in the winter evenings? You sang songs to us, and told us tales——

BIÖRN.

Ay, then you were blithe and gay.

ELINA.

Ah, then, Biörn! Then I lived a glorious life in fable-land, and in my own imaginings. Can

it be that the sea-strand was naked then as now? If it was so, I knew it not. 'Twas there I loved to go weaving all my fair romances; my heroes came from afar and sailed again across the sea; I lived in their midst, and set forth with them when they sailed away. [*Sinks on a chair.*] Now I feel so faint and weary; I can live no longer in my tales. They are only—tales. [*Rising, vehemently.*] Biörn, know you what has made me sick? A truth; a hateful, hateful truth, that gnaws me day and night.

BIÖRN.

What mean you?

ELINA.

Do you remember how sometimes you would give us good counsel and wise saws? Sister Lucia followed them; but I—ah, well-a-day!

BIÖRN.

[*Consoling her.*] Well, well——!

ELINA.

I know it—I was proud, overweening! In all our games, I would still be the Queen, because I was the tallest, the fairest, the wisest! I know it!

BIÖRN.

That is true.

ELINA.

Once you took me by the hand and looked earnestly at me, and said: "Be not proud of your

fairness, or your wisdom; but be proud as the mountain eagle as often as you think: I am Inger Gyldenlöve's daughter!"

BIÖRN.

And was it not matter enough for pride?

ELINA.

You told me so often enough, Biörn! Oh, you told me many a tale in those days. [*Presses his hand.*] Thanks for them all!—Now, tell me one more; it might make me light of heart again, as of old.

BIÖRN.

You are a child no longer.

ELINA.

Nay, indeed! But let me dream that I am. —Come, tell on!

[*Throws herself into a chair.* BIÖRN *sits on the edge of the high hearth.*

BIÖRN.

Once upon a time there was a high-born knight——

ELINA.

[*Who has been listening restlessly in the direction of the hall, seizes his arm and breaks out in a vehement whisper.*] Hush! No need to shout so loud; I can hear well!

BIÖRN.

[*More softly.*] Once upon a time there was a high-born knight, of whom there went the strange report——

[ELINA *half rises, and listens in anxious suspense in the direction of the hall.*

BIÖRN.

Mistress Elina,—what ails you?

ELINA.

[*Sits down again.*] Me? Nothing. Go on.

BIÖRN.

Well, as I was saying—did this knight but look straight in a woman's eyes, never could she forget it after; her thoughts must follow him wherever he went, and she must waste away with sorrow.

ELINA.

I have heard that tale.—Moreover, 'tis no tale you are telling, for the knight you speak of is Nils Lykke, who sits even now in the Council of Denmark——

BIÖRN.

May be so.

ELINA.

Well, let it pass—go on!

BIÖRN.

Now it happened once on a time——

ELINA.

[*Rises suddenly.*] Hush; be still!

BIÖRN.

What now? What is the matter?

ELINA.

[*Listening.*] Do you hear?

BIÖRN.

What?

ELINA.

It is there! Yes, by the cross of Christ, it is there!

BIÖRN.

[*Rises.*] What is there? Where?

ELINA.

She herself—in the hall——

[*Goes hastily towards the hall.*

BIÖRN.

[*Following.*] How can you think—? Mistress Elina,—go to your chamber!

ELINA.

Hush; stand still! Do not move; do not let her see you! Wait—the moon is coming out. Can you not see the black-robed figure——?

BIÖRN.

By all the saints——!

ELINA.

Do you see—she turns Knut Alfson's picture to the wall. Ha-ha; be sure it looks her too straight in the eyes!

BIÖRN.

Mistress Elina, hear me!

ELINA.

[*Going back towards the fireplace.*] Now I know what I know!

BIÖRN.

[*To himself.*] Then it is true!

ELINA.

Who was it, Biörn? Who was it?

BIÖRN.

You saw as plainly as I.

ELINA.

Well? Whom did I see?

BIÖRN.

You saw your mother.

ELINA.

[*Half to herself.*] Night after night I have heard her steps in there. I have heard her whispering and moaning like a soul in pain. And what says the song—? Ah, now I know! Now I know that——

BIÖRN.

Hush!

[LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *enters rapidly from the hall, without noticing the others; she goes to the window, draws the curtain, and gazes out as if watching for some one on the high road; after a while, she turns and goes slowly back into the hall.*

ELINA.

[*Softly, following her with her eyes.*] White, white as the dead——!

[*An uproar of many voices is heard outside the door on the right.*

BIÖRN.

What can this be?

ELINA.

Go out and see what is amiss.

[EINAR HUK, *the bailiff, appears in the anteroom, with a crowd of* RETAINERS *and* PEASANTS.

EINAR HUK.

[*In the doorway.*] Straight in to her! And be not abashed!

BIÖRN.

What seek you?

EINAR HUK.

Lady Inger herself.

BIÖRN.

Lady Inger? So late?

EINAR HUK.

Late, but time enough, I wot.

THE PEASANTS.

Yes, yes; she must hear us now!

[*The whole rabble crowds into the room. At the same moment* LADY INGER *appears in the doorway of the hall. A sudden silence.*

LADY INGER.

What would you with me?

EINAR HUK.

We sought you, noble lady, to——

LADY INGER.

Well—say on!

EINAR HUK.

Why, we are not ashamed of our errand. In one word—we come to pray you for weapons and leave——

LADY INGER.

Weapons and leave—? And for what?

EINAR HUK.

There has come a rumour from Sweden that the people of the Dales have risen against King Gustav——

LADY INGER.

The people of the Dales?

EINAR HUK.

Ay, so the tidings run, and they seem sure enough.

LADY INGER.

Well—if it were so—what have you to do with the Dale-folk's rising?

THE PEASANTS.

We will join them! We will help. We will free ourselves!

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] Can the time be come?

EINAR HUK.

From all our borderlands the peasants are pouring across to the Dales. Even outlaws that have wandered for years in the mountains are venturing down to the homesteads again, and drawing men together, and whetting their rusty swords.

LADY INGER.

[*After a pause.*] Tell me, men—have you thought well of this? Have you counted the cost, if King Gustav's men should win?

BIÖRN.

[*Softly and imploringly to* LADY INGER.] Count the cost to the Danes if King Gustav's men should lose.

LADY INGER.

[*Evasively.*] That reckoning is not for me to make. [*Turns to the people.*
You know that King Gustav is sure of help from Denmark. King Frederick is his friend, and will never leave him in the lurch——

EINAR HUK.

But if the people were now to rise all over Norway's land?—if we all rose as one man, nobles and peasants together?—Ay, Lady Inger Gyldenlöve, the time we have waited for is surely come. We have but to rise now to drive the strangers from the land.

THE PEASANTS.

Ay, out with the Danish sheriffs! Out with the foreign masters! Out with the Councillors' lackeys!

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] Ah, there is metal in them; and yet, yet——!

BIÖRN.

[*To himself.*] She is of two minds. [*To* ELINA.] What say you now, Mistress Elina—have you not sinned in misjudging your mother?

ELINA.

Biörn—if my eyes have lied to me, I could tear them out of my head!

EINAR HUK.

See you not, my noble lady, King Gustav must be dealt with first. Were his power once gone, the Danes cannot long hold this land——

LADY INGER.

And then?

EINAR HUK.

Then we shall be free. We shall have no more foreign masters, and can choose ourselves a king, as the Swedes have done before us.

LADY INGER.

[*With animation.*] A king for ourselves! Are you thinking of the Sture [1] stock?

EINAR HUK.

King Christiern and others after him have swept bare our ancient houses. The best of our nobles are outlaws on the mountain paths, if so be they still live. Nevertheless, it might still be possible to find one or other shoot of the old stems——

LADY INGER.

[*Hastily.*] Enough, Einar Huk, enough! [*To herself.*] Ah, my dearest hope!

[*Turns to the* PEASANTS *and* RETAINERS.

I have warned you, now, as well as I can. I have told you how great is the risk you run. But if you are fixed in your purpose, 'twere folly in me to forbid what I have no power to prevent.

[1] Pronounce *Stoorë*.

EINAR HUK.

Then we have your leave to——?

LADY INGER.

You have your own firm will; take counsel with that. If it be as you say, that you are daily harassed and oppressed—— I know but little of these matters. I will not know more! What can I, a lonely woman—? Even if you were to plunder the Banquet Hall—and there's many a good weapon on the walls—you are the masters at Östråt to-night. You must do as seems good to you. Good-night!

[*Loud cries of joy from the multitude. Candles are lighted; the* RETAINERS *bring out weapons of different kinds from the hall.*

BIÖRN.

[*Seizes* LADY INGER'S *hand as she is going.*] Thanks, my noble and high-souled mistress! I, that have known you from childhood up—I have never doubted you.

LADY INGER.

Hush, Biörn—'tis a dangerous game I have ventured this night. The others stake only their lives; but I, trust me, a thousandfold more!

BIÖRN.

How mean you? Do you fear for your power and your favour with——?

LADY INGER.

My power? O God in Heaven!

A Retainer.

[*Comes from the hall with a large sword.*] See, here's a real good wolf's-tooth! With this will I flay the blood-suckers' lackeys!

Einar Huk.

[*To another.*] What is that you have found?

The Retainer.

The breastplate they call Herlof Hyttefad's.

Einar Huk.

'Tis too good for such as you. Look, here is the shaft of Sten Sture's [1] lance; hang the breastplate upon it, and we shall have the noblest standard heart can desire.

Finn.

[*Comes from the door on the left, with a letter in his hand, and goes towards* Lady Inger.] I have sought you through all the house——

Lady Inger.

What would you?

Finn.

[*Hands her the letter.*] A messenger is come from Trondhiem [2] with a letter for you.

Lady Inger.

Let me see! [*Opening the letter.*] From Trondhiem? What can it be? [*Runs through*

[1] Pronounce *Stayn Stoorë.* [2] Pronounce *Tronyem.*

the letter.] O God! From him! and here in Norway——

[*Reads on with strong emotion, while the men go on bringing out arms from the hall.*

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] He is coming here. He is coming here to-night!—Ay, then 'tis with our wits we must fight, not with the sword.

EINAR HUK.

Enough, enough, good fellows; we are well armed now. Set we forth now on our way!

LADY INGER.

[*With a sudden change of tone.*] No man shall leave my house to-night!

EINAR HUK.

But the wind is fair, noble lady; 'twill take us quickly up the fiord, and——

LADY INGER.

It shall be as I have said.

EINAR HUK.

Are we to wait till to-morrow, then?

LADY INGER.

Till to-morrow, and longer still. No armed man shall go forth from Östråt yet awhile.

[*Signs of displeasure among the crowd.*

SOME OF THE PEASANTS.

We will go all the same, Lady Inger!

THE CRY SPREADS.

Ay, ay; we will go!

LADY INGER.

[*Advancing a step towards them.*] Who dares to move?

[*A silence. After a moment's pause, she adds:*

I have thought for you. What do you common folk know of the country's needs? How dare you judge of such things? You must e'en bear your oppressions and burdens yet awhile. Why murmur at that, when you see that we, your leaders, are as ill bested as you?— —Take all the weapons back to the hall. You shall know my further will hereafter. Go!

[*The* RETAINERS *take back the arms, and the whole crowd then withdraws by the door on the right.*

ELINA.

[*Softly to* BIÖRN.] Say you still that I have sinned in misjudging—the Lady of Östråt?

LADY INGER.

[*Beckons to* BIÖRN, *and says.*] Have a guest-chamber ready.

BIÖRN.

It is well, Lady Inger!

LADY INGER.

And let the gate be open to whoever shall knock.

BIÖRN.

But——?

LADY INGER.

The gate open!

BIÖRN.

The gate open. [*Goes out to the right.*

LADY INGER.

[*To* ELINA, *who has already reached the door on the left.*] Stay here!—— Elina—my child —I have something to say to you alone.

ELINA.

I hear you.

LADY INGER.

Elina——you think evil of your mother.

ELINA.

I think, to my sorrow, what your deeds have forced me to think.

LADY INGER.

And you answer as your bitter spirit bids you.

ELINA.

Who has filled my spirit with bitterness? From my childhood I had been wont to look up to you as a great and high-souled woman. 'Twas

in your likeness that I pictured the women of the chronicles and the Book of Heroes. I thought the Lord God himself had set his seal on your brow, and marked you out as the leader of the helpless and the oppressed. Knights and nobles sang your praise in the feast-hall; and even the peasants, far and near, called you the country's pillar and its hope. All thought that through you the good times were to come again! All thought that through you a new day was to dawn over the land! The night is still here; and I scarce knew if through you I dare look for any morning.

LADY INGER.

'Tis easy to see whence you have learnt such venomous words. You have let yourself give ear to what the thoughtless rabble mutters and murmurs about things it can little judge of.

ELINA.

"Truth is in the people's mouth," was your word when they praised you in speech and song.

LADY INGER.

May be so. But if indeed I chose to sit here idle, though it was my part to act—think you not that such a choice were burden enough for me, without your adding to its weight?

ELINA.

The weight I add to your burden crushes me no less than you. Lightly and freely I drew the breath of life, so long as I had you to be-

lieve in. For my pride is my life; and well might I have been proud, had you remained what once you were.

LADY INGER.

And what proves to you that I have not? Elina—how know you so surely that you are not doing your mother wrong?

ELINA.

[*Vehemently.*] Oh, that I were!

LADY INGER.

Peace! You have no right to call your mother to account.—With a single word I could— —; but 'twould be an ill word for you to hear; you must await what time shall bring; may be that——

ELINA.

[*Turns to go.*] Sleep well, my mother!

LADY INGER.

[*Hesitates.*] Nay—stay with me; I have still somewhat— — Come nearer;—you must hear me, Elina!

[*Sits down by the table in front of the window.*

ELINA.

I hear you.

LADY INGER.

For as silent as you are, I know well that you often long to be gone from here. Östråt is too lonely and lifeless for you.

ELINA.

Do you wonder at that, my mother?

LADY INGER.

It rests with you whether all this shall henceforth be changed.

ELINA.

How so?

LADY INGER.

Listen.—I look for a guest to-night.

ELINA.

[*Comes nearer.*] A guest?

LADY INGER.

A guest, who must remain a stranger to all. None must know whence he comes or whither he goes.

ELINA.

[*Throws herself, with a cry of joy, at her mother's feet, and seizes her hands.*] My mother! My mother! Forgive me, if you can, all the wrong I have done you!

LADY INGER.

What do you mean? Elina, I do not understand you.

ELINA.

Then they were all deceived! You are still true at heart!

LADY INGER.

Rise, rise and tell me——

ELINA.

Think you I do not know who the stranger is?

LADY INGER.

You know? And yet——?

ELINA.

Think you the gates of Östråt shut so close that never a whisper of the country's woe can slip through them? Think you I do not know that the heir of many a noble line wanders outlawed, without rest or shelter, while Danish masters lord it in the home of his fathers?

LADY INGER.

And what then?

ELINA.

I know well that many a high-born knight is hunted through the woods like a hungry wolf. No hearth has he to rest by, no bread to eat——

LADY INGER.

[*Coldly.*] Enough! Now I understand you.

ELINA.

[*Continuing.*] And that is why the gates of Östråt must stand open by night! That is why he must remain a stranger to all, this guest of whom none must know whence he comes or

whither he goes! You are setting at naught the harsh decree that forbids you to harbour or succour the outlaw——

LADY INGER.

Enough, I say!

[*After a short silence, adds with an effort:*
You mistake, Elina—'tis no outlaw I look for.

ELINA.

[*Rises.*] Then I have understood you ill indeed.

LADY INGER.

Listen to me, my child; but think as you listen; if indeed you can tame that wild spirit of yours.

ELINA.

I am tame, till you have spoken.

LADY INGER.

Attend, then, to what I have to tell you.—I have sought, so far as lay in my power, to keep you in ignorance of all our griefs and miseries. What could it avail to fill your young heart with wrath and care? 'Tis not women's weeping and wailing that can deliver us; we need the courage and strength of men.

ELINA.

Who has told you that, when courage and strength are needed, I shall be found wanting?

LADY INGER.

Hush, child;—I might take you at your word.

ELINA.

How mean you, my mother?

LADY INGER.

I might call on you for both; I might——; but let me say my say out first.

Know then that the time seems now to be drawing nigh, towards which the Danish Council have been working for many a year—the time, I mean, for them to strike the last blow at our rights and our freedom. Therefore must we now——

ELINA.

[*Eagerly.*] Openly rebel, my mother?

LADY INGER.

No; we must gain breathing-time. The Council is now assembled at Copenhagen, considering how best to go to work. Most of them hold, 'tis said, that there can be no end to dissensions till Norway and Denmark are one; for should we still possess our rights as a free land when the time comes to choose the next king, 'tis most like that the feud will break out openly. Now the Danish councillors would hinder this——

ELINA.

Ay, they would hinder it—! But are we to endure such things? Are we to look on quietly while——?

LADY INGER.

No, we will not endure it. But to take up arms—to declare open war—what would come

of that, so long as we are not united? And were we ever less united in this land than we are even now?—No, if aught is to be accomplished, it must be secretly and in silence. Even as I said, we must have time to draw breath. In the South, a good part of the nobles are for the Dane; but here in the North they are still in doubt. Therefore has King Frederick sent hither one of his most trusted councillors, to assure himself with his own eyes how we stand affected.

ELINA.

[*In suspense.*] Well—and then——?

LADY INGER.

He is the guest I look for to-night.

ELINA.

He comes hither? And to-night?

LADY INGER.

A trading ship brought him to Trondhiem yesterday. News has just reached me of his approach; he may be here within the hour.

ELINA.

And you do not bethink you, my mother, how 'twill endanger your fame thus to receive the Danish envoy? Do not the people already look on you with distrustful eyes? How can you hope that, when the time comes, they will let you rule and guide them, if it be known that——

LADY INGER.

Fear not. All this I have fully weighed; but there is no danger. His errand in Norway is a secret; he has come unknown to Trondhiem, and unknown shall he be our guest at Östråt.

ELINA.

And the name of this Danish lord——?

LADY INGER.

It sounds well, Elina; Denmark has scarce a nobler name.

ELINA.

But what then do you purpose? I cannot yet grasp your meaning.

LADY INGER.

You will soon understand.—Since we cannot trample on the serpent, we must bind it.

ELINA.

Take heed that it burst not your bonds.

LADY INGER.

It rests with you to tighten them as you will.

ELINA.

With me?

LADY INGER.

I have long seen that Östråt is as a cage to you. The young falcon chafes behind the iron bars.

ELINA.

My wings are clipped. Even if you set me free—'twould avail me little.

LADY INGER.

Your wings are not clipped, save by your own will.

ELINA.

Will? My will is in your hands. Be what you once were, and I too——

LADY INGER.

Enough, enough. Hear me further.—It would scarce break your heart to leave Östråt?

ELINA.

Maybe not, my mother!

LADY INGER.

You told me once, that you lived your happiest life in your tales and histories. What if that life were to be yours once more?

ELINA.

What mean you?

LADY INGER.

Elina—if a mighty noble were to come and lead you to his castle, where you should find damsels and squires, silken robes and lofty halls awaiting you?

ELINA.

A noble, you say?

LADY INGER.

A noble.

ELINA.

[*More softly.*] And the Danish envoy comes hither to-night?

LADY INGER.

To-night.

ELINA.

If so be, then I fear to read the meaning of your words.

LADY INGER.

There is naught to fear if you misread them not. It is far from my thought to put force upon you. You shall choose for yourself in this matter, and follow your own rede.

ELINA.

[*Comes a step nearer.*] Know you the tale of the mother who drove across the hills by night, with her little children in the sledge? The wolves were on her track; 'twas life or death with her;—and one by one she cast out her little ones, to win time and save herself.

LADY INGER.

Nursery tales! A mother would tear the heart from her breast, before she would cast her child to the wolves!

ELINA.

Were I not my mother's daughter, I would say you were right. But you are like that

mother; one by one have you cast out your daughters to the wolves. The eldest went first. Five years ago Merete [1] went forth from Östråt; now she dwells in Bergen, and is Vinzents Lunge's [2] wife. But think you she is happy as the Danish noble's lady? Vinzents Lunge is mighty, well-nigh as a king; Merete has damsels and squires, silken robes and lofty halls; but the day has no sunshine for her, and the night no rest; for she has never loved him. He came hither and he wooed her, for she was the greatest heiress in Norway, and 'twas then needful for him to gain a footing in the land. I know it; I know it well! Merete bowed to your will; she went with the stranger lord.—But what has it cost her? More tears than a mother should wish to answer for at the day of reckoning!

LADY INGER.

I know my reckoning, and I fear it not.

ELINA.

Your reckoning ends not here. Where is Lucia, your second child?

LADY INGER.

Ask God, who took her.

ELINA.

'Tis you I ask; 'tis you must answer for her young life. She was glad as a bird in spring

[1] Pronounce *Mayraytë*. [2] Pronounce *Loonghë*.

when she sailed from Östråt to be Merete's guest. A year passed, and she stood in this room once more; but her cheeks were white, and death had gnawed deep into her breast. Ah, I startle you, my mother! You thought the ugly secret was buried with her;—but she told me all. A courtly knight had won her heart. He would have wedded her. You knew that her honour was at stake; yet your will never bent—and your child had to die. You see, I know all!

LADY INGER.

All? Then she told you his name?

ELINA.

His name? No; his name she did not tell me. She shrank from his name as though it stung her;—she never uttered it.

LADY INGER.

[*Relieved, to herself.*] Ah, then you do not know all——

Elina—'tis true that the whole of this matter was well known to me. But there is one thing it seems you have overlooked. The lord whom Lucia met in Bergen was a Dane——

ELINA.

That, too, I know.

LADY INGER.

And his love was a lie. With guile and soft speeches he had ensnared her.

ELINA.

I know it; but nevertheless she loved him; and had you had a mother's heart, your daughter's honour had been more to you than all.

LADY INGER.

Not more than her happiness. Think you that, with Merete's lot before my eyes, I could sacrifice my second child to a man that loved her not?

ELINA.

Cunning words may beguile many, but they beguile not me——

Think not I know nothing of all that is passing in our land. I understand your counsels but too well. I know that in you the Danish lords have no true friend. It may be that you hate them; but you fear them too. When you gave Merete to Vinzents Lunge, the Danes held the mastery on all sides throughout our land. Three years later, when you forbade Lucia to wed the man to whom, though he had deceived her, she had given her life—things were far different then. The King's Danish governors had shamefully misused the common people, and you deemed it not wise to link yourself still more closely to the foreign tyrants.

And what have you done to avenge her that was sent so young to her grave? You have done nothing. Well then, I will act in your stead; I will avenge all the shame they have brought upon our people and our house!

LADY INGER.

You? What will you do?

ELINA.

I will go my way, even as you go yours. What I shall do I myself know not; but I feel within me the strength to dare all for our righteous cause.

LADY INGER.

Then have you a hard fight before you. I once promised as you do now—and my hair has grown grey under the burden of that promise.

ELINA.

Good-night! Your guest will soon be here, and at that meeting I should be one too many.

It may be there is yet time for you— —; well, God strengthen and guide you on your path! Forget not that the eyes of many thousands are fixed on you. Think on Merete, weeping late and early over her wasted life. Think on Lucia, sleeping in her black coffin.

And one thing more. Forget not that in the game you play this night, your stake is your last child. [*Goes out to the left.*

LADY INGER.

[*Looks after her awhile.*] My last child? You know not how true was that word— — But the stake is not my child only. God help me, I am playing to-night for the whole of Norway's land.

Ah—is not that some one riding through the gateway? [*Listens at the window.*

No; not yet. Only the wind; it blows cold as the grave—— ——

Has God a right to do this?—To make me a woman—and then to lay on my shoulders a man's work?

For I have the welfare of the country in my hands. It is in my power to make them rise as one man. They look to me for the signal; and if I give it not now—it may never be given.

To delay? To sacrifice the many for the sake of one?—Were it not better if I could— —? No, no, no—I will not! I cannot!

[*Steals a glance towards the Banquet Hall, but turns away again as if in dread, and whispers:*

I can see them in there now. Pale spectres —dead ancestors—fallen kinsfolk.—Ah, those eyes that pierce me from every corner!

[*Makes a gesture of repulsion, and cries:*

Sten Sture! Knut Alfson! Olaf Skaktavl! Back—back!—I cannot do this!

[*A* STRANGER, *strongly built, and with grizzled hair and beard, has entered from the Banquet Hall. He is dressed in a torn lambskin tunic; his weapons are rusty.*

THE STRANGER.

[*Stops in the doorway, and says in a low voice.*] Hail to you, Inger Gyldenlöve!

LADY INGER.

[*Turns with a scream.*] Ah, Christ in heaven save me!

[*Falls back into a chair. The* STRANGER *stands gazing at her, motionless, leaning on his sword.*

ACT SECOND

The room at Östrât, as in the first Act.

LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *is seated at the table on the right, by the window.* OLAF SKAKTAVL *is standing a little way from her. Their faces show that they have been engaged in a heated discussion.*

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

For the last time, Inger Gyldenlöve—you are not to be moved from your purpose?

LADY INGER.

I can do nought else. And my counsel to you is: do as I do. If it be Heaven's will that Norway perish utterly, perish it must, for all we may do to save it.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

And think you I can content my heart with that belief? Shall I sit and look idly on, now that the hour is come? Do you forget the reckoning I have against them? They have robbed me of my lands, and parcelled them out among themselves. My son, my only child, the last of my race, they have slaughtered like a dog. Myself they have outlawed and hunted through

forest and fell these twenty years.—Once and again have folk whispered of my death; but this I believe, that they shall not lay me beneath the sod before I have seen my vengeance.

LADY INGER.

There is there a long life before you. What have you in mind to do?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Do? How should I know what I will do? It has never been my part to plot and plan. That is where you must help me. You have the wit for that. I have but my sword and my two arms.

LADY INGER.

Your sword is rusted, Olaf Skaktavl! All the swords in Norway are rusted.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

That is doubtless why some folk fight only with their tongues.—Inger Gyldenlöve—great is the change in you. Time was when the heart of a man beat in your breast.

LADY INGER.

Put me not in mind of what was.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis for that very purpose I am here. You shall hear me, even if——

LADY INGER.

Be it so then; but be brief; for—I must say it—this is no place of safety for you.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Östråt is no place of safety for an outlaw? That I have long known. But you forget that an outlaw is unsafe wheresoever he may wander.

LADY INGER.

Speak then; I will not hinder you.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis nigh on thirty years now since first I saw you. It was at Akershus [1] in the house of Knut Alfson and his wife. You were little more than a child then; yet were you bold as the soaring falcon, and wild and headstrong too at times. Many were the wooers around you. I too held you dear—dear as no woman before or since. But you cared for nothing, thought of nothing, save your country's evil case and its great need.

LADY INGER.

I counted but fifteen summers then—remember that! And was it not as though a frenzy had seized us all in those days?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Call it what you will; but one thing I know —even the old and sober men among us thought

[1] Pronounce *Ahkers-hoos*.

it written in the counsels of the Lord on high that you were she who should break our thraldom and win us all our rights again. And more: you yourself then thought as we did.

LADY INGER.

'Twas a sinful thought, Olaf Skaktavl. 'Twas my proud heart, and not the Lord's call, that spoke in me.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

You could have been the chosen one had you but willed it. You came of the noblest blood in Norway; power and riches were soon to be yours; and you had an ear for the cries of anguish—then!

Do you remember that afternoon when Henrik Krummedike and the Danish fleet anchored off Akershus? The captains of the fleet offered terms of peace, and, trusting to the safe-conduct, Knut Alfson rowed on board. Three hours later, we bore him through the castle gate——

LADY INGER.

A corpse; a corpse!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

The best heart in Norway burst, when Krummedike's hirelings struck him down. Methinks I still can see the long procession that passed into the banquet-hall, heavily, two by two. There he lay on his bier, white as a spring cloud, with the axe-cleft in his brow. I may safely say that the boldest men in Norway

were gathered there that night. Lady Margrete stood by her dead husband's head, and we swore as one man to venture lands and life to avenge this last misdeed and all that had gone before.—Inger Gyldenlöve,—who was it that burst through the circle of men? A maiden—almost a child—with fire in her eyes and her voice half choked with tears.—What was it she swore? Shall I repeat your words?

LADY INGER.

I swore what the rest of you swore; neither more nor less.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

You remember your oath—and yet you have forgotten it.

LADY INGER.

And how did the others keep their promise? I speak not of you, Olaf Skaktavl, but of your friends, all Norway's nobles? Not one of them, in all these years, has had the courage to be a man; yet they lay it to my charge that I am a woman.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

I know what you would say. Why have they bent to the yoke, and not defied the tyrants to the last? 'Tis but too true; there is base metal enough in our noble houses nowadays. But had they held together—who knows what then might have been? And you could have held them together, for before you all had bowed.

LADY INGER.

My answer were easy enough, but 'twould scarce content you. So let us leave speaking of what cannot be changed. Tell me rather what has brought you to Östråt. Do you need harbour? Well, I will try to hide you. If you would have aught else, speak out; you shall find me ready——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

For twenty years have I been homeless. In the mountains of Jæmteland my hair has grown grey. My dwelling has been with wolves and bears.—You see, Lady Inger—*I* need you not; but both nobles and people stand in sore need of you.

LADY INGER.

The old burden.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, it sounds but ill in your ears, I know; yet hear it you must, for all that. In brief, then: I come from Sweden: troubles are brewing: the Dales are ready to rise.

LADY INGER.

I know it.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Peter Kanzler [1] is with us—secretly, you understand.

LADY INGER.

[*Starting.*] Peter Kanzler?

[1] That is, Peter the Chancellor.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis he that has sent me to Östråt.

LADY INGER.

[*Rises.*] Peter Kanzler, say you?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He himself;—but mayhap you no longer know him?

LADY INGER.

[*Half to herself.*] Only too well!—But tell me, I pray you,—what message do you bring?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

When the rumour of the rising reached the border mountains, where I then was, I set off at once into Sweden. 'Twas not hard to guess that Peter Kanzler had a finger in the game. I sought him out and offered to stand by him;—he knew me of old, as you know, and knew that he could trust me; so he has sent me hither.

LADY INGER.

[*Impatiently.*] Yes yes,—he sent you hither to——?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*With secrecy.*] Lady Inger—a stranger comes to Östråt to-night.

LADY INGER.

[*Surprised.*] What? Know you that——?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Assuredly I know it. I know all. 'Twas to meet him that Peter Kanzler sent me hither.

LADY INGER.

To meet him? Impossible, Olaf Skaktavl,—impossible!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis as I tell you. If he be not already come, he will soon——

LADY INGER.

Doubtless, doubtless; but——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Then you knew of his coming?

LADY INGER.

Ay, surely. He sent me a message. 'Twas therefore they opened to you as soon as you knocked.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Listens.*] Hush!—some one is riding along the road. [*Goes to the window.*] They are opening the gate.

LADY INGER.

[*Looks out.*] It is a knight and his attendant. They are dismounting in the courtyard.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Tis he then. His name?

LADY INGER.

You know not his name?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Peter Kanzler refused to tell it me. He would say no more than that I should find him at Östråt the third evening after Martinmas——

LADY INGER.

Ay; even to-night.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He was to bring letters with him; and from them, and from you, I was to learn who he is.

LADY INGER.

Then let me lead you to your chamber. You have need of rest and refreshment. You shall soon have speech with the stranger.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Well, be it as you will.

[*Both go out to the left.*

[*After a short pause,* FINN *enters cautiously by the door on the right, looks round the room, and peeps into the Banquet Hall; he then goes back to the door, and makes a sign to some one outside. Immediately after, enter* COUNCILLOR NILS LYKKE *and the Swedish Commander,* JENS BIELKE.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly.*] No one?

FINN.

[*In the same tone.*] No one, master!

NILS LYKKE.

And we may depend on you in all things?

FINN.

The commandant in Trondhiem has ever given me a name for trustiness.

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis well; he has said as much to me. First of all, then—has there come any stranger to Östråt to-night, before us?

FINN.

Ay; a stranger came an hour since.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly, to* JENS BIELKE.] He is here. [*Turns again to* FINN.] Would you know him again? Have you seen him?

FINN.

Nay, none has seen him, that I know, but the gatekeeper. He was brought at once to Lady Inger, and she——

NILS LYKKE.

Well? What of her? He is not gone again already?

FINN.

No; but it seems she holds him hidden in one of her own rooms; for——

NILS LYKKE.

It is well.

JENS BIELKE.

[*Whispers.*] Then the first thing is to put a guard on the gate; so are we sure of him.

NILS LYKKE.

[*With a smile.*] H'm! [*To* FINN.] Tell me—is there any way of leaving the castle, save by the gate? Gape not at me so! I mean—can one escape from Östråt unseen, though the castle gate be barred?

FINN.

Nay, that I know not. 'Tis true they talk of secret ways in the vaults beneath; but no one knows them save Lady Inger—and mayhap Mistress Elina.

JENS BIELKE.

The devil!

NILS LYKKE.

It is well. You may go.

FINN.

Should you need me in aught again, you have but to open the second door on the right in the Banquet Hall, and I shall presently be at hand.

NILS LYKKE.

Good.

[*Points to the entrance-door.* FINN *goes out.*

JENS BIELKE.

Now, by my soul, dear friend and brother—this campaign is like to end but scurvily for both of us.

NILS LYKKE.

[*With a smile.*] Oh—not for me, I hope.

JENS BIELKE.

Say you so? First of all, there is little honour to be won in hunting an overgrown whelp like this Nils Sture. Are we to think him mad or in his sober senses after the pranks he has played? First he breeds bad blood among the peasants; promises them help and all their hearts can desire;—and then, when it comes to the pinch, off he runs to hide behind a petticoat!

Moreover, to say truth, I repent that I followed your counsel and went not my own way.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] Your repentance comes somewhat late, my brother!

JENS BIELKE.

For, let me tell you, I have never loved digging at a badger's earth. I looked for quite other sport. Here have I ridden all the way from Jæmteland with my horsemen, and have

got me a warrant from the Trondhiem commandant to search for the rebel wheresoever I please. All his tracks point towards Östråt——

NILS LYKKE.

He is here! He is here, I tell you!

JENS BIELKE.

Were it not liker, in that case, that we had found the gate barred and well guarded? Would that we had; then could I have found use for my men-at-arms——

NILS LYKKE.

But instead, the gate is very courteously thrown open to us. Mark now—if Inger Gyldenlöve's fame belie her not, I warrant she will not let her guests lack for either meat or drink.

JENS BIELKE.

Ay, to turn us aside from our errand! And what wild whim was that of yours to have me leave my horsemen half a league from the castle? Had we come in force——

NILS LYKKE.

She had made us none the less welcome for that. But mark well that then our coming had made a stir. The peasants round about had held it for an outrage against Lady Inger; she had risen high in their favour once more—and with that, look you, we were ill served.

JENS BIELKE.

May be so. But what am I to do now? Count Sture is in Östråt, you say. Ay, but how does that profit me? Be sure Lady Inger Gyldenlöve has as many hiding-places as the fox, and more than one outlet to them. You and I, alone, may go snuffing about here as long as we please. I would the devil had the whole affair!

NILS LYKKE.

Well, then, my friend—if you like not the turn your errand has taken, you have but to leave the field to me.

JENS BIELKE.

To you? What will you do?

NILS LYKKE.

Caution and cunning may in this matter prove of more avail than force of arms.—And to say truth, Captain Jens Bielke—something of the sort has been in my mind ever since we met in Trondhiem yesterday.

JENS BIELKE.

Was that why you persuaded me to leave the men-at-arms?

NILS LYKKE.

Both your purpose at Östråt and mine could best be served without them; and so——

JENS BIELKE.

The foul fiend seize you—I had almost said! And me to boot! Might I not have known that there is guile in all your dealings?

NILS LYKKE.

Be sure I shall need all my guile here, if I am to face my foe with even weapons. And let me tell you, 'tis of the utmost moment to me that I acquit me of my mission secretly and well. You must know that when I set forth I was scarce in favour with my lord the King. He held me in suspicion; though I dare swear I have served him as well as any man could, in more than one ticklish charge.

JENS BIELKE.

That you may safely boast. God and all men know you for the craftiest devil in all the three kingdoms.

NILS LYKKE.

I thank you! Though, after all, 'tis not much to say. But this present errand I count as indeed a crowning test of my powers; for here I have to outwit a woman——

JENS BIELKE.

Ha-ha-ha! In that art you have long since given crowning proofs of your skill, dear brother. Think you we in Sweden know not the song—

Fair maidens a-many they sigh and they pine:
"Ah God, that Nils Lykke were mine, mine, mine!"

NILS LYKKE.

Alas, 'tis women of twenty and thereabouts that ditty speaks of. Lady Inger Gyldenlöve is nigh on fifty, and wily to boot beyond all women. 'Twill be no light matter to overmatch her. But it must be done—at any cost. Should I contrive to win certain advantages over her that the King has long desired, I can reckon on the embassy to France next spring. You know that I spent three years at the University in Paris? My whole soul is set on coming thither again, most of all if I can appear in lofty place, a king's ambassador.—Well, then—is it agreed—do you leave Lady Inger to me? Remember—when you were last at Court in Copenhagen, I made way for you with more than one fair lady——

JENS BIELKE.

Nay, truly now—that generosity cost you little; one and all of them were at your beck and call. But let that pass; now that I have begun amiss in this matter, I had as lief that you should take it on your shoulders. Yet one thing you must promise—if the young Count Sture be in Östråt, you will deliver him into my hands, dead or alive!

NILS LYKKE.

You shall have him all alive. I, at any rate, mean not to kill him. But now you must ride

back and join your people. Keep guard on the road. Should I mark aught that mislikes me, you shall know it forthwith.

JENS BIELKE.

Good, good. But how am I to get out——?

NILS LYKKE.

The fellow that brought us in will show the way. But go quietly——

JENS BIELKE.

Of course, of course. Well—good fortune to you!

NILS LYKKE.

Fortune has never failed me in a war with women. Haste you now!

[JENS BIELKE *goes out to the right.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Stands still for a while; then walks about the room, looking round him; then he says softly:*] At last, then, I am at Östråt—the ancient hall whereof a child, two years ago, told me so much.

Lucia. Ay, two years ago she was still a child. And now—now she is dead. [*Hums with a half-smile.*] "Blossoms plucked are blossoms withered——"

[*Looks round him again.*

Östråt. 'Tis as though I had seen it all before; as though I were at home here.—In there

is the Banquet Hall. And underneath is—the grave-vault. It must be there that Lucia lies.

[*In a lower voice, half seriously, half with forced gaiety.*

Were I timorous, I might well find myself fancying that when I set foot within Östråt gate she turned about in her coffin; as I crossed the courtyard she lifted the lid; and when I named her name but now, 'twas as though a voice summoned her forth from the grave-vault.—Maybe she is even now groping her way up the stairs. The face-cloth blinds her, but she gropes on and on in spite of it.

Now she has reached the Banquet Hall! She stands watching me from behind the door!

[*Turns his head backwards over one shoulder, nods, and says aloud:*

Come nearer, Lucia! Talk to me a little! Your mother keeps me waiting. 'Tis tedious waiting—and you have helped me to while away many a tedious hour—— ——

[*Passes his hand over his forehead, and takes one or two turns up and down.*

Ah, there!—Right, right; there is the deep curtained window. 'Tis there that Inger Gyldenlöve is wont to stand gazing out over the road, as though looking for one that never comes. In there—[*looks towards the door on the left*]—somewhere in there is Sister Elina's chamber. Elina? Ay, Elina is her name.

Can it be that she is so rare a being—so wise and so brave as Lucia fancied her? Fair, too,

they say. But for a wedded wife—? I should not have written so plainly.——

[*Lost in thought, he is on the point of sitting down by the table, but stands up again.*

How will Lady Inger receive me?—She will scarce burn the castle over our heads, or slip me through a trap-door. A stab from behind—? No, not that way either——

[*Listens towards the hall.*

Aha!

[LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *enters from the hall.*

LADY INGER.

[*Coldly.*] My greeting to you, Sir Councillor——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Bows deeply.*] Ah—the Lady of Östråt!

LADY INGER.

——and my thanks that you have forewarned me of your visit.

NILS LYKKE.

I could do no less. I had reason to think that my coming might surprise you——

LADY INGER.

Truly, Sir Councillor, therein you judged aright. Nils Lykke was indeed the last guest I looked to see at Östråt.

NILS LYKKE.

And still less, mayhap, did you think to see him come as a friend?

LADY INGER.

As a friend? You add mockery to all the shame and sorrow you have heaped upon my house? After bringing my child to the grave, you still dare——

NILS LYKKE.

With your leave, Lady Inger Gyldenlöve—on that matter we should scarce agree; for you count as nothing what *I* lost by that same unhappy chance. I purposed nought but in honour. I was tired of my unbridled life; my thirtieth year was already past; I longed to mate me with a good and gentle wife. Add to all this the hope of becoming your son-in-law——

LADY INGER.

Beware, Sir Councillor! I have done all in my power to hide my child's unhappy fate. But because it is out of sight, think not it is out of mind. There may yet come a time——

NILS LYKKE.

You threaten me, Lady Inger? I have offered you my hand in amity; you refuse to take it. Henceforth, then, it is to be open war between us?

LADY INGER.

I knew not there had ever been aught else?

NILS LYKKE.

Not on your side, mayhap. *I* have never been your enemy,—though, as a subject of the King of Denmark, I lacked not good cause.

LADY INGER.

I understand you. I have not been pliant enough. It has not proved so easy as some of you hoped to lure me over into your camp.—Yet methinks you have nought to complain of. My daughter Merete's husband is your countryman—further I cannot go. My position is no easy one, Nils Lykke!

NILS LYKKE.

That I can well believe. Both nobles and people here in Norway think they have an ancient claim on you—a claim, 'tis said, you have but half fulfilled.

LADY INGER.

Your pardon, Sir Councillor,—I account for my doings to none but God and myself. If it please you, then, let me understand what brings you hither.

NILS LYKKE.

Gladly, Lady Inger! The purpose of my mission to this country can scarce be unknown to you——?

LADY INGER.

I know the mission that report assigns you. Our King would fain know how the Norwegian nobles stand affected towards him.

NILS LYKKE.

Assuredly.

LADY INGER.

Then that is why you visit Östråt?

NILS LYKKE.

In part. But it is far from my purpose to demand any profession of loyalty from you——

LADY INGER.

What then?

NILS LYKKE.

Hearken to me, Lady Inger! You said yourself but now that your position is no easy one. You stand half way between two hostile camps, whereof neither dares trust you fully. Your own interest must needs bind you to us. On the other hand, you are bound to the disaffected by the bond of nationality, and—who knows?—mayhap by some secret tie as well.

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] A secret tie! Oh God, can he——?

NILS LYKKE.

[*Notices her emotion, but makes no sign, and continues without change of manner.*] You cannot but see that such a position must ere long become impossible.—Suppose, now, it lay in my power to free you from these embarrassments which——

LADY INGER.

In your power, you say?

NILS LYKKE.

First of all, Lady Inger, I would beg you to lay no stress on any careless words I may have used concerning that which lies between us two. Think not that I have forgotten for a moment the wrong I have done you. Suppose, now, I had long purposed to make atonement, as far as might be, where I had sinned. Suppose it were for that reason I had contrived to have this mission assigned me.

LADY INGER.

Speak your meaning more clearly, Sir Councillor;—I cannot follow you.

NILS LYKKE.

I can scarce be mistaken in thinking that you, as well as I, know of the threatened troubles in Sweden. You know, or at least you can guess, that this rising is of far wider aim than is commonly supposed, and you understand therefore that our King cannot look on quietly and let things take their course. Am I not right?

LADY INGER.

Go on.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Searchingly, after a short pause.*] There is one possible chance that might endanger Gustav Vasa's throne——

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] Whither is he tending?

NILS LYKKE.

——the chance, namely, that there should exist in Sweden a man entitled by his birth to claim election to the kingship.

LADY INGER.

[*Evasively.*] The Swedish nobles have been even as bloodily hewn down as our own, Sir Councilior. Where would you seek for——?

NILS LYKKE.

[*With a smile.*] Seek? The man is found already——

LADY INGER.

[*Starts violently.*] Ah! He is found?

NILS LYKKE.

——and he is too closely akin to you, Lady Inger, to be far from your thoughts at this moment. [*Looks fixedly at her.*
The last Count Sture left a son——

LADY INGER.

[*With a cry.*] Holy Saviour, how know you——?

NILS LYKKE.

[*Surprised.*] Be calm, Madam, and let me finish.—This young man has till now lived quietly with his mother, Sten Sture's widow.

LADY INGER.

[*Breathes more freely.*] With—? Ah, yes —true, true!

NILS LYKKE.

But now he has come forward openly. He has shown himself in the Dales as leader of the peasants; their numbers are growing day by day; and—as mayhap you know—they are finding friends among the peasants on this side of the border-hills.

LADY INGER.

[*Who has in the meantime regained her composure.*] Sir Councillor,—you speak of all these matters as though they must of necessity be known to me. What ground have I given you to believe so? I know, and wish to know, nothing. All my care is to live quietly within my own domain; I give no countenance to disturbers of the peace; but neither must you reckon on me if it be your purpose to suppress them.

NILS LYKKE.

[*In a low voice.*] Would you still be inactive, were it my purpose to come to their aid?

LADY INGER.

How am I to understand you?

NILS LYKKE.

Have you not seen, then, whither I have been aiming all this time?—Well, I will tell you all, frankly and openly. Know, then, that the King

and his Council see clearly that we can have no sure footing in Norway so long as the nobles and the people continue, as now, to think themselves wronged and oppressed. We understand to the full that willing allies are better than sullen subjects; and we have therefore no heartier wish than to loosen the bonds that hamper us, in effect, even as straitly as you. But you will scarce deny that the temper of Norway towards us makes such a step too dangerous—so long as we have no sure support behind us.

LADY INGER.

And this support——?

NILS LYKKE.

Should naturally come from Sweden. But, mark well, not so long as Gustav Vasa holds the helm; his reckoning with Denmark is not yet settled, and mayhap never will be. But a new king of Sweden, who had the people with him, and who owed his throne to the help of Denmark— —. Well, you begin to understand me? Then we could safely say to you Norwegians: "Take back your old ancestral rights; choose you a ruler after your own mind; be our friends in need, as we will be yours!"—Mark you well, Lady Inger, herein is our generosity less than it may seem; for you must see that, far from weakening, 'twill rather strengthen us.

And now that I have opened my heart to you so fully, do you too cast away all mistrust. And therefore [*confidently*]—the knight from Sweden, who came hither an hour before me——

LADY INGER.

Then you already know of his coming?

NILS LYKKE.

Most certainly. 'Tis he whom I seek.

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] Strange! Then it must be as Olaf Skaktavl said. [*To* NILS LYKKE.] I pray you wait here, Sir Councillor! I will go bring him to you.

[*Goes out through the Banquet Hall.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks after her a while in exultant astonishment.*] She is bringing him! Ay, truly—she is bringing him! The battle is half won. I little thought it would go so smoothly.—

She is deep in the counsels of the rebels; she started in terror when I named Sten Sture's son.—

And now? H'm! Since Lady Inger has been simple enough to walk into the snare, Nils Sture will not make many difficulties. A hot-blooded boy, thoughtless and rash— —. With my promise of help he will set forth at once—unhappily Jens Bielke will snap him up by the way—and the whole rising will be nipped in the bud.

And then? Then one further point to our advantage. It is spread abroad that the young Count Sture has been at Östråt,—that a Danish envoy has had audience of Lady Inger—that thereupon the young Count Nils has been

snapped up by King Gustav's men-at-arms a mile from the castle.—— Let Inger Gyldenlöve's name among the people stand never so high—'twill scarce recover from such a blow.

[*Starts up in sudden uneasiness.*

By all the devils—! What if she has scented mischief! It may be he is even now slipping through our fingers— [*Listens towards the hall, and says with relief.*] Ah, there is no fear. Here they come.

[LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *enters from the hall, accompanied by* OLAF SKAKTAVL.

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS LYKKE.] Here is the man you seek.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Powers of hell—what means this?

LADY INGER.

I have told this knight your name and all that you have imparted to me——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Irresolutely.*] Ay? Have you so? Well——

LADY INGER.

——and I will not hide from you that his faith in your help is none of the strongest.

NILS LYKKE.

Is it not?

LADY INGER.

Can you marvel at that? Surely you know both his way of thinking and his bitter fate——

NILS LYKKE.

This man's—? Ah—yes, truly——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*To* NILS LYKKE.] But seeing 'tis Peter Kanzler himself that has appointed us this meeting——

NILS LYKKE.

Peter Kanzler—? [*Recovers himself quickly.*] Ay, right,—I have a mission from Peter Kanzler——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He must know best whom he can trust. So why should I trouble my head with pondering how——

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, you are right, noble Sir; why waste time over that?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Rather let us come straight to the matter.

NILS LYKKE.

Straight to the point; no beating about the bush—'tis ever my fashion.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Then will you tell me your errand here?

NILS LYKKE.

Methinks you can partly guess my errand——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Peter Kanzler said something of papers that——

NILS LYKKE.

Papers? Ay, true, the papers!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Doubtless you have them with you?

NILS LYKKE.

Of course; safely bestowed; so safely that I cannot at once——

[*Appears to search the inner pockets of his doublet; says to himself:*

Who the devil is he? What pretext can I make? I may be on the brink of great discoveries——

[*Notices that the* SERVANTS *are laying the table and lighting the lamps in the Banquet Hall, and says to* OLAF SKAKTAVL:

Ah, I see Lady Inger has taken order for the evening meal. Mayhap we could better talk of our affairs at table.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Good; as you will.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Time gained—all gained!

[*To* LADY INGER *with a show of great friendliness:*

And meanwhile we might learn what part Lady Inger Gyldenlöve purposes to take in our design?

LADY INGER.

I?—None.

NILS LYKKE AND OLAF SKAKTAVL.

None!

LADY INGER.

Can ye marvel, noble Sirs, that I venture not on a game wherein loss would mean loss of all? And that, too, when none of my allies dare trust me fully.

NILS LYKKE.

That reproach touches not me. I trust you blindly; I pray you be assured of that.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Who should believe in you, if not your countrymen?

LADY INGER.

Truly,—this confidence rejoices me.

[*Goes to a cupboard in the back wall and fills two goblets with wine.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Curse her, will she slip out of the noose?

LADY INGER.

[*Hands a goblet to each.*] And since so it is, I offer you a cup of welcome to Östråt. Drink, noble knights! Pledge me to the last drop!

[*Looks from one to the other after they have drunk, and says gravely:*

But now I must tell you—one goblet held a welcome for my friend; the other—death for my enemy!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Throws down the goblet.*] Ah, I am poisoned!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*At the same time, clutches his sword.*] Death and hell, have you murdered me?

LADY INGER.

[*To* OLAF SKAKTAVL, *pointing to* NILS LYKKE.] You see the Danes' confidence in Inger Gyldenlöve——

[*To* NILS LYKKE, *pointing to* OLAF SKAKTAVL.] ——and likewise my countrymen's faith in me! [*To both of them.*

Yet you would have me place myself in your power? Gently, noble Sirs—gently! The Lady of Östråt is not yet in her dotage.

[ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *enters by the door on the left.*

ELINA.

I heard loud voices—. What is amiss?

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS LYKKE.] My daughter Elina.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly.*] Elina! I had not pictured her thus.

[ELINA *catches sight of* NILS LYKKE, *and stands still, as in surprise, gazing at him.*

LADY INGER.

[*Touches her arm.*] My child—this knight is——

ELINA.

[*Motions her mother back with her hand, still looking intently at him, and says:*] There is no need! I see who he is. He is Nils Lykke.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside, to* LADY INGER.] How? Does she know me? Can Lucia have—? Can she know——?

LADY INGER.

Hush! She knows nothing.

ELINA.

[*To herself.*] I knew it;—even so must Nils Lykke appear.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Approaches her.*] Yes, Elina Gyldenlöve, —you have guessed aright. And as it seems that, in some sense, you know me,—and, more-

over, as I am your mother's guest,—you will not deny me the flower-spray you wear in your bosom. So long as it is fresh and fragrant, I shall have in it an image of yourself.

ELINA.

[*Proudly, but still gazing at him.*] Pardon me, Sir Knight—'twas plucked in my own chamber, and there can grow no flower for you.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Loosening a spray of flowers that he wears in the front of his doublet.*] At least you will not disdain this humble gift. 'Twas a farewell token from a courtly dame when I set forth from Trondhiem this morning.—But mark me, noble maiden,—were I to offer you a gift that were fully worthy of you, it could be nought less than a princely crown.

ELINA.

[*Who has taken the flowers passively.*] And were it the royal crown of Denmark you held forth to me—before I shared it with you, I would crush it to pieces between my hands, and cast the fragments at your feet!

[*Throws down the flowers at his feet, and goes into the Banquet Hall.*

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Mutters to himself.*] Bold—as Inger Ottis-daughter by Knut Alfson's bier!

LADY INGER.

[*Softly, after looking alternately at* ELINA *and* NILS LYKKE.] The wolf can be tamed. Now to forge the fetters.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Picks up the flowers and gazes in rapture after* ELINA.] God's holy blood, but she is proud and fair!

ACT THIRD

The Banquet Hall. A high bow-window in the background; a smaller window in front on the left. Several doors on each side. The ceiling is supported by massive wooden pillars, on which, as well as on the walls, are hung all sorts of weapons. Pictures of saints, knights, and ladies hang in long rows. Pendent from the ceiling a large many-branched lamp, alight. In front, on the right, an ancient carven high-seat. In the middle of the hall, a table with the remnants of the evening meal.

ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *enters from the left, slowly and in deep thought. Her expression shows that she is going over again in her mind the scene with* NILS LYKKE. *At last she repeats the motion with which she flung away the flowers, and says in a low voice:*

ELINA.

——And then he gathered up the fragments of the crown of Denmark—no, 'twas the flowers —and: "God's holy blood, but she is proud and fair!"

Had he whispered the words in the most secret spot, long leagues from Östråt,—still had I heard them!

How I hate him! How I have always hated him,—this Nils Lykke!—There lives not another man like him, 'tis said. He plays with women—and treads them under his feet.

And 'twas to him my mother thought to offer me!—How I hate him!

They say Nils Lykke is unlike all other men. It is not true! There is nothing strange in him. There are many, many like him! When Biörn used to tell me his tales, all the princes looked as Nils Lykke looks. When I sat lonely here in the hall and dreamed my histories, and my knights came and went,—they were one and all even as he.

How strange and how good it is to hate! Never have I known how sweet it can be—till to-night. Ah—not to live a thousand years would I sell the moments I have lived since I saw him!—

"God's holy blood, but she is proud— —"

[*Goes slowly towards the back, opens the window and looks out.* NILS LYKKE *comes in by the first door on the right.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] "Sleep well at Östråt, Sir Knight," said Inger Gyldenlöve as she left me. Sleep well? Ay, 'tis easily said, but— — Out there, sky and sea in tumult; below, in the grave-vault, a young girl on her bier; the fate of two kingdoms in my hand;—and in my breast a withered flower that a woman has flung at my feet. Truly, I fear me sleep will be slow of coming.

[*Notices* ELINA, *who has left the window, and is going out on the left.*

There she is. Her haughty eyes seem veiled with thought.—Ah, if I but dared—. [*Aloud.*] Mistress Elina!

ELINA.

[*Stops at the door.*] What will you? Why do you pursue me?

NILS LYKKE.

You err; I pursue you not. I am myself pursued.

ELINA.

You?

NILS LYKKE.

By a multitude of thoughts. Therefore 'tis with sleep as with you:—it flees me.

ELINA.

Go to the window, and there you will find pastime;—a storm-tossed sea——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Smiles.*] A storm-tossed sea? That may I find in you as well.

ELINA.

In me?

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, of that our first meeting has assured me.

ELINA.

And that offends you?

NILS LYKKE.

Nay, in nowise; yet I could wish to see you of milder mood.

ELINA.

[*Proudly.*] Think you that you will ever have your wish?

NILS LYKKE.

I am sure of it. I have a welcome word to say to you.

ELINA.

What is it?

NILS LYKKE.

Farewell.

ELINA.

[*Comes a step nearer him.*] Farewell? You are leaving Östråt—so soon?

NILS LYKKE.

This very night.

ELINA.

[*Seems to hesitate for a moment; then says coldly.*] Then take my greeting, Sir Knight!

[*Bows and is about to go.*

NILS LYKKE.

Elina Gyldenlöve,—I have no right to keep you here; but 'twill be unlike your nobleness if you refuse to hear what I have to say to you.

ELINA.

I hear you, Sir Knight.

NILS LYKKE.

I know you hate me.

ELINA.

You are keen-sighted, I perceive.

NILS LYKKE.

But I know, too, that I have fully merited your hate. Unseemly and wounding were the words I wrote of you in my letter to Lady Inger.

ELINA.

Like enough; I have not read them.

NILS LYKKE.

But at least their purport is not unknown to you; I know your mother has not left you in ignorance of the matter; at the least she has told you how I praised the lot of the man who—; surely you know the hope I nursed—

ELINA.

Sir Knight—if 'tis of that you would speak—

NILS LYKKE.

I speak of it, only to ask pardon for my words; for no other reason, I swear to you. If my fame—as I have too much cause to fear—has gone before me to Östråt, you must needs know enough of my life not to wonder that in

such things I should go to work something boldly. I have met many women, Elina Gyldenlöve; but not one have I found unyielding. Such lessons, look you, teach a man to be secure. He loses the habit of roundabout ways——

ELINA.

May be so. I know not of what metal those women can have been made.

For the rest, you err in thinking 'twas your letter to my mother that aroused my soul's hatred and bitterness against you. It is of older date.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Uneasily.*] Of older date? What mean you?

ELINA.

'Tis as you guessed:—your fame has gone before you, to Östråt, even as over all the land. Nils Lykke's name is never spoken save with the name of some woman whom he has beguiled and cast off. Some speak it in wrath, others with laughter and wanton jeering at those weak-souled creatures. But through the wrath and the laughter and the jeers rings the song they have made of you, full of insolent challenge, like an enemy's song of triumph.

'Tis all this together that has begotten my hate for you. You were ever in my thoughts, and ever I longed to meet you face to face, that you might learn that there are women on whom your subtle speeches are lost—if you should think to use them.

NILS LYKKE.

You judge me unjustly, if you judge from what rumour has told of me. Even if there be truth in all you have heard,—you know not the causes behind it.—As a boy of seventeen I began my course of pleasure. I have lived full fifteen years since then. Light women granted me all that I would—even before the wish had shaped itself into a prayer; and what I offered them they seized with eager hands. You are the first woman that has flung back a gift of mine with scorn at my feet.

Think not I reproach you. Rather I honour you for it, as never before have I honoured woman. But for this I reproach my fate—and the thought is a gnawing pain to me—that you and I were not sooner brought face to face.— — Elina Gyldenlöve! Your mother has told me of you. While far from Östråt life ran its restless course, you went your lonely way in silence, living in your dreams and histories. Therefore you will understand what I have to tell you.— Know, then, that once I too lived even such a life as yours. Methought that when I stepped forth into the great world, a noble and stately woman would come to meet me, and would beckon to me and point out the path towards a glorious goal.—I was deceived, Elina Gyldenlöve! Women came to meet me; but she was not among them. Ere yet I had come to full manhood, I had learnt to despise them all.

Was it my fault? Why were not the others even as you?—I know the fate of your fatherland lies heavy on your soul; and you know the

part I have in these affairs— —. 'Tis said of me that I am false as the sea-foam. Mayhap I am; but if I be, it is women who have made me so. Had I sooner found what I sought,—had I met a woman proud and noble and high-souled even as you, then had my path been different indeed. At this moment, maybe, I had been standing at your side as the champion of all that suffer wrong in Norway's land. For this I believe: a woman is the mightiest power in the world, and in her hand it lies to guide a man whither God Almighty would have him go.

ELINA.

[*To herself.*] Can it be as he says? Nay, nay; there is falsehood in his eyes and deceit on his lips. And yet—no song is sweeter than his words.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Coming closer, speaks low and more intimately.*] As you have dwelt here at Östråt, alone with your changeful thoughts, how often have you felt your bosom stifling; how often have the roof and walls seemed to shrink together till they crushed your very soul. Then have your longings taken wing with you; then have you yearned to fly far from here, you knew not whither.—How often have you not wandered alone by the fiord; far out a ship has sailed by in fair array, with knights and ladies on her deck, with song and music of stringed instruments;—a faint, far-off rumour of great events has reached your ears;—and you have felt a longing in your breast, an unconquerable

craving to know all that lies beyond the sea. But you have not understood what ailed you. At times you have thought it was the fate of your fatherland that filled you with all these restless broodings. You deceived yourself;—a maiden so young as you has other food for musing.—— Elina Gyldenlöve! Have you never had visions of an unknown power—a strong mysterious might, that binds together the destinies of mortals? When you dreamed of the many-coloured life far out in the wide world —when you dreamed of knightly jousts and joyous festivals—saw you never in your dreams a knight, who stood in the midst of the gayest rout, with a smile on his lips and with bitterness in his heart,—a knight that had once dreamed a dream as fair as yours, of a woman noble and stately, for whom he went ever a-seeking, and ever in vain?

ELINA.

Who are you, that have power to clothe my most secret thoughts in words? How can you tell me what I have borne in my inmost soul—yet knew it not myself? How know you——?

NILS LYKKE.

All that I have told you, I have read in your eyes.

ELINA.

Never has any man spoken to me as you have spoken. I have understood you but dimly; and yet—all, all seems changed since——

[*To herself.*] Now I understand why they said that Nils Lykke was unlike all others.

NILS LYKKE.

There is one thing in the world that might drive a man to madness, but to think of it; and that is the thought of what might have been, had things but fallen out in this way or that. Had I met you on my path while the tree of my life was yet green and budding, at this hour, mayhap, you had been— —

But forgive me, noble lady! Our speech of these past few moments has made me forget how we stand one to another. 'Twas as though a secret voice had told me from the first that to you I could speak openly, without flattery or dissimulation.

ELINA.

That can you.

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis well;—and it may be that this openness has already in part reconciled us. Ay—my hope is yet bolder. The time may yet come when you will think of the stranger knight without hate or bitterness in your soul. Nay,—mistake me not! I mean not now—but some time, in the days to come. And that this may be the less hard for you—and as I have begun once for all to speak to you plainly and openly —let me tell you——

ELINA.

Sir Knight——!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Smiling.*] Ah, I see the thought of my letter still affrights you. Fear nought on that score. I would from my heart it were unwritten, for—I know 'twill concern you little enough, so I may even say it right out—for I love you not, and shall never come to love you. Fear nothing, therefore, as I said before; I shall in nowise seek to— —

But what ails you——?

ELINA.

Me? Nothing, nothing.—Tell me but one thing: why do you still wear those flowers? What would you with them?

NILS LYKKE.

These? Are they not a gage of battle you have thrown down to the wicked Nils Lykke, on behalf of all womankind? What could I do but take it up?

You asked what I would with them? [*Softly.*] When I stand again amid the fair ladies of Denmark—when the music of the strings is hushed and there is silence in the hall—then will I bring forth these flowers and tell a tale of a young maiden sitting alone in a gloomy black-beamed hall, far to the north in Norway—— [*Breaks off and bows respectfully.*

But I fear I detain the noble daughter of the house too long. We shall meet no more; for before daybreak I shall be gone. So now I bid you farewell.

ELINA.

Fare you well, Sir Knight! [*A short silence.*

NILS LYKKE.

Again you are deep in thought, Elina Gyldenlöve! Is it the fate of your fatherland that weighs upon you still?

ELINA.

[*Shakes her head, absently gazing straight in front of her.*] My fatherland?—I think not of my fatherland.

NILS LYKKE.

Then 'tis the strife and misery of the time that disquiets you.

ELINA.

The time? I had forgotten it—— —— You go to Denmark? Said you not so?

NILS LYKKE.

I go to Denmark.

ELINA.

Can I look towards Denmark from this hall?

NILS LYKKE.

[*Points to the window on the left.*] Ay, from this window. Denmark lies there, to the south.

ELINA.

And is it far from here? More than a hundred leagues?

NILS LYKKE.

Much more. The sea lies between you and Denmark.

ELINA.

[*To herself.*] The sea? Thought has seagulls' wings. The sea cannot stay it.

[*Goes out to the left.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks after her awhile; then says:*] If I could but spare two days now—or even one—I would have her in my power, even as the others. And yet is there rare stuff in this maiden. She is proud. Might I not after all——? No; rather humble her— —

[*Paces the room.*

Verily, I believe she has set my blood afire. Who would have thought it possible after all these years?—Enough of this! I must get out of the tangle I have here thrust myself into.

[*Sits in a chair on the right.*

What is the meaning of it? Both Olaf Skaktavl and Inger Gyldenlöve seem blind to the mistrust 'twill waken, when 'tis rumoured that I am in their league.—Or can Lady Inger have seen through my purpose? Can she have seen that all my promises were but designed to lure Nils Sture forth from his hiding-place?

[*Springs up.*

Damnation! Is it I that have been fooled? 'Tis like enough that Count Sture is not at Östråt at all. It may be the rumour of his flight was but

a feint. He may be safe and sound among his friends in Sweden, while I——

[*Walks restlessly up and down.*

And to think I was so sure of success! If I should effect nothing? If Lady Inger should penetrate all my designs—and publish my discomfiture—. To be a laughing-stock both here and in Denmark! To have sought to lure Lady Inger into a trap—and given her cause the help it most needed—strengthened her in the people's favour——! Ah, I could well-nigh sell myself to the Evil One, would he but help me to lay hands on Count Sture.

[*The window in the background is pushed open.* NILS STENSSON *appears outside.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Clutches at his sword.*] Who is there?

NILS STENSSON.

[*Jumps down on to the floor.*] Ah; here I am at last then!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] What means this?

NILS STENSSON.

God's peace, master!

NILS LYKKE.

Thanks, good Sir! Methinks you have chosen a strange way of entrance.

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, what the devil was I to do? The gate was shut. Folk must sleep in this house like bears at Yuletide.

NILS LYKKE.

God be thanked! Know you not that a good conscience is the best pillow?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, it must be even so; for with all my rattling and thundering, I——

NILS LYKKE.

——You won not in?

NILS STENSSON.

You have hit it. So I said to myself: As you are bidden to be in Östråt to-night, if you have to go through fire and water, you may surely make free to creep through a window.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Ah, if it should be——!

[*Moves a step or two nearer.*

Was it, then, of the last necessity that you should reach Östråt to-night?

NILS STENSSON.

Was it? Ay, faith but it was. I love not to keep folk waiting, I can tell you.

NILS LYKKE.

Aha,—then Lady Inger Gyldenlöve looks for your coming?

NILS STENSSON.

Lady Inger Gyldenlöve? Nay, that I can scarce say for certain; [*with a sly smile*] but there might be some one else——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Smiles in answer.*] Ah, so there might be some one else—?

NILS STENSSON.

Tell me—are you of the house?

NILS LYKKE.

I? Well, in so far that I am Lady Inger's guest this evening.

NILS STENSSON.

A guest?—Is not to-night the third night after Martinmas?

NILS LYKKE.

The third night after—? Ay, right enough. —Would you seek the lady of the house at once? I think she is not yet gone to rest. But might not you sit down and rest awhile, dear young Sir? See, here is yet a flagon of wine remaining, and doubtless you will find some food. Come, fall to; you will do wisely to refresh your strength.

NILS STENSSON.

You are right, Sir; 'twere not amiss.

[*Sits down by the table and eats and drinks.*

Both roast meat and sweet cakes! Why, you live like lords here! When one has slept, as I have, on the naked ground, and lived on bread and water for four or five days——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks at him with a smile.*] Ay, such a life must be hard for one that is wont to sit at the high-table in noble halls——

NILS STENSSON.

Noble halls——?

NILS LYKKE.

But now can you take your ease at Östråt, as long as it likes you.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Pleased.*] Ay? Can I truly? Then I am not to begone again so soon?

NILS LYKKE.

Nay, that I know not. Sure you yourself can best say that.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Softly.*] Oh, the devil! [*Stretches himself in the chair.*] Well, you see—'tis not yet certain. I, for my part, were nothing loath to stay quiet here awhile; but——

NILS LYKKE.

——But you are not in all points your own master? There be other duties and other affairs——?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, that is just the rub. Were I to choose, I would rest me at Östråt at least the winter through; I have for the most part led a soldier's life, and——

[*Interrupts himself suddenly, fills a goblet, and drinks.*

Your health, Sir!

NILS LYKKE.

A soldier's life? H'm!

NILS STENSSON.

Nay, what I would have said is this: I have long been eager to see Lady Inger Gyldenlöve, whose fame has spread so wide. She must be a queenly woman,—is't not so?—The one thing I like not in her, is that she is so cursedly slow to take open action.

NILS LYKKE.

Open action?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, ay, you understand me; I mean she is so loath to take a hand in driving the foreign masters out of the land.

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, there you are right. But if now you do what you can, you will doubtless move her.

NILS STENSSON.

I? God knows 'twould but little serve if *I*——

NILS LYKKE.

Yet 'tis strange you should seek her here if you have so little hope.

NILS STENSSON.

What mean you?—Tell me, know you Lady Inger?

NILS LYKKE.

Surely; since I am her guest——

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, but it in nowise follows that you know her. I too am her guest, yet have I never seen so much as her shadow.

NILS LYKKE.

Yet did you speak of her——

NILS STENSSON.

——as all folk speak. Why should I not? And besides, I have often enough heard from Peter Kanzler——

[*Stops in confusion, and falls to eating busily.*

NILS LYKKE.

You would have said——?

NILS STENSSON.

[*Eating.*] I? Nay, 'tis all one.

[NILS LYKKE *laughs.*

NILS STENSSON.

Why laugh you, Sir?

NILS LYKKE.

At nothing, Sir!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Drinks.*] A pretty vintage ye have in this house.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Approaches him confidentially.*] Listen—were it not time now to throw off the mask?

NILS STENSSON.

[*Smiling.*] The mask? Why, do as seems best to you.

NILS LYKKE.

Then off with all disguise. You are known, Count Sture!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Bursts out laughing.*] Count Sture? Do you too take me for Count Sture?

[*Rises from the table.*

You mistake, Sir! I am not Count Sture.

NILS LYKKE.

You are not? Then who are you?

NILS STENSSON.

My name is Nils Stensson.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks at him with a smile.*] H'm! Nils Stensson? But you are not Sten Sture's son Nils? The name chimes at least.

NILS STENSSON.

True enough; but God knows what right I have to bear it. My father I never knew; my mother was a poor peasant-woman, that was robbed and murdered in one of the old feuds. Peter Kanzler chanced to be on the spot; he took me into his care, brought me up, and taught me the trade of arms. As you know, King Gustav has been hunting him this many a year; and I have followed him faithfully, wherever he went.

NILS LYKKE.

Peter Kanzler has taught you more than the trade of arms, meseems.—— Well, well; then you are not Nils Sture. But at least you come from Sweden. Peter Kanzler has sent you hither to find a stranger, who——

NILS STENSSON.

[*Nods cunningly.*] ——who is found already.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Somewhat uncertain.*] And whom you do not know?

NILS STENSSON.

As little as you know me; for I swear to you by God himself: I am not Count Sture!

NILS LYKKE.

In sober earnest, Sir?

NILS STENSSON.

As truly as I live! Wherefore should I deny it, if I were?

NILS LYKKE.

But where, then, is Count Sture?

NILS STENSSON.

[*In a low voice.*] Ay, that is just the secret.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Whispers.*] Which is known to you? Is't not so?

NILS STENSSON.

[*Nods.*] And which I am to tell you.

NILS LYKKE.

To tell me? Well then,—where is he?

[NILS STENSSON *points upwards.*

NILS LYKKE.

Up there? Lady Inger holds him hidden in the loft-room?

NILS STENSSON.

Nay, nay; you mistake me.

[*Looks round cautiously.*

Nils Sture is in Heaven!

NILS LYKKE.

Dead? And where?

NILS STENSSON.

In his mother's castle,—three weeks since.

NILS LYKKE.

Ah, you are deceiving me! 'Tis but five or six days since he crossed the frontier into Norway.

NILS STENSSON.

Oh, that was I.

NILS LYKKE.

But just before that the Count had appeared in the Dales. The people, who were restless already, broke out openly and would have chosen him for king.

NILS STENSSON.

Ha-ha-ha; that was me too!

NILS LYKKE.

You?

NILS STENSSON.

I will tell you how it came about. One day Peter Kanzler called me to him and gave me to

know that great things were preparing. He bade me set out for Norway and fare to Östråt, where I must be on a certain fixed day——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Nods.*] The third night after Martinmas.

NILS STENSSON.

There I was to meet a stranger——

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, right; I am he.

NILS STENSSON.

From him I should learn what more I had to do. Moreover, I was to let him know that the Count was dead of a sudden, but that as yet 'twas known to no one save to his mother the Countess, together with Peter Kanzler and a few old servants of the Stures.

NILS LYKKE.

I understand. The Count was the peasants' rallying-point. Were the tidings of his death to spread, they would fall asunder,—and 'twould all come to nought.

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, maybe so; I know little of such matters.

NILS LYKKE.

But how came you to give yourself out for the Count?

NILS STENSSON.

How came I to——? Nay, what know I? Many's the mad prank I have hit on in my day. And yet 'twas not I hit on it neither; for wherever I appeared in the Dales, the people crowded round me and hailed me as Count Sture. Deny it as I pleased, 'twas wasted breath. The Count had been there two years before, they said—and the veriest child knew me again. Well, so be it, thought I; never again will you be a Count in this life; why not try what 'tis like for once?

NILS LYKKE.

Well,—and what did you more?

NILS STENSSON.

I? I ate and drank and took my ease. The only pity was that I had to take the road again so soon. But when I set forth across the frontier—ha-ha-ha—I promised them I would soon be back with three or four thousand men—I know not how many I said—and then we would lay on in earnest.

NILS LYKKE.

And you did not bethink you that you were acting rashly?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, afterwards; but then, to be sure, 'twas too late.

NILS LYKKE.

I grieve for you, my young friend; but you will soon come to feel the effects of your folly. Let me tell you that you are pursued. A troop of Swedish men-at-arms is out after you.

NILS STENSSON.

After me? Ha-ha-ha! Nay, that is rare! And when they come and think they have Count Sture in their clutches—ha-ha-ha!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Gravely.*] ——Then 'tis all over with you.

NILS STENSSON.

All over——? But I am not Count Sture.

NILS LYKKE.

You have called the people to arms. You have given seditious promises, and raised troubles in the land.

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, but 'twas only in jest!

NILS LYKKE.

King Gustav will scarce take that view of the affair.

NILS STENSSON.

Truly, there is something in what you say. To think I could be so featherwitted—— Well, well, I'm not a dead man yet! You will pro-

tect me; and besides—the men-at-arms can scarce be at my heels yet.

NILS LYKKE.

But what else have you to tell me?

NILS STENSSON.

I? Nothing. When once I have given you the packet——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Off his guard.*] The packet?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, sure you know——

NILS LYKKE.

Ah, right, right; the papers from Peter Kanzler——

NILS STENSSON.

See, here they all are.

[*Takes out a packet from inside his doublet, and hands it to* NILS LYKKE.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Letters and papers for Olaf Skaktavl. [*To* NILS STENSSON.

The packet is open, I see. 'Tis like you know what it contains?

NILS STENSSON.

No, good sir; I love not to read writing; and for reason good.

NILS LYKKE.

I understand; you have given most care to the trade of arms.

[*Sits down by the table on the right, and runs through the papers.*

Aha! Here is light enough and to spare on what is brewing.

This small letter tied with a silken thread—[*Examines the address.*] This too for Olaf Skaktavl. [*Opens the letter, and glances through its contents.*] From Peter Kanzler. I thought as much. [*Reads under his breath.*] "I am hard bested, for—"; ay, sure enough; here it stands,—"Young Count Sture has been gathered to his fathers, even at the time fixed for the revolt to break forth"—" —but all may yet be made good—" What now? [*Reads on in astonishment.*] "You must know, then, Olaf Skaktavl, that the young man who brings you this letter is a son of—" Heaven and earth—can it be so?—Ay, by the cross of Christ, even so 'tis written! [*Glances at* NILS STENSSON.] Can he be—? Ah, if it were so! [*Reads on.*] "I have nurtured him since he was a year old; but up to this day I have ever refused to give him back, trusting to have in him a sure hostage for Inger Gyldenlöve's faithfulness to us and to our friends. Yet in that respect he has but little availed us. You may marvel that I told you not this secret when you were with me here of late; therefore will I confess freely that I feared you might seize upon him, even as I had done, and to the same intent. But now, when you have seen Lady Inger, and have doubtless assured

yourself how loath she is to have a hand in our undertaking, you will see that 'tis wisest to give her back her own as soon as may be. Well might it come to pass that in her joy and security and thankfulness—" —— "—that is now our last hope."

[*Sits for a while as though struck dumb with surprise; then exclaims in a low voice:*

Aha,—what a letter! Gold would not buy it!

NILS STENSSON.

'Tis plain I have brought you weighty tidings. Ay, ay,—Peter Kanzler has many irons in the fire, folk say.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] What to do with all this? A thousand paths are open to me— What if I were—? No, 'twere to risk too much. But if —ah, if I—? I will venture it!

[*Tears the letter across, crumples up the pieces, and hides them inside his doublet; puts back the other papers into the packet, which he thrusts inside his belt; rises and says:*

A word, my young friend!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Approaching him.*] Well—your looks say that the game goes bravely.

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, by my soul it does. You have given me a hand of nought but court cards,—queens and knaves——

NILS STENSSON.

But what of me, that have brought all these good tidings? Have I nought more to do?

NILS LYKKE.

You? Ay, that have you. You belong to the game. You are a king—and king of trumps too.

NILS STENSSON.

I a king? Oh, now I understand; you are thinking of my exaltation——

NILS LYKKE.

Your exaltation?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay; that which you foretold for me, if King Gustav's men got me in their clutches——

[*Makes a motion to indicate hanging.*

NILS LYKKE.

True enough;—but let that trouble you no more. It now lies with yourself alone whether within a month you shall have the hempen noose or a chain of gold about your neck.

NILS STENSSON.

A chain of gold? And it lies with me?

[NILS LYKKE *nods.*

NILS STENSSON.

Why then, the devil take doubting! Do you but tell me what I am to do.

NILS LYKKE.

I will. But first you must swear me a solemn oath that no living creature in the wide world shall know what I confide to you.

NILS STENSSON.

Is that all? You shall have ten oaths, if you will.

NILS LYKKE.

Not so lightly, young Sir! 'Tis no jesting matter.

NILS STENSSON.

Well, well; I am grave enough.

NILS LYKKE.

In the Dales you called yourself a Count's son;—is't not so?

NILS STENSSON.

Nay—begin you now on that again? Have I not made free confession——

NILS LYKKE.

You mistake me. What you said in the Dales was the truth.

NILS STENSSON.

The truth? What mean you by that? Tell me but——!

NILS LYKKE.

First your oath! The holiest, the most inviolable you can swear.

NILS STENSSON.

That you shall have. Yonder on the wall hangs the picture of the Holy Virgin——

NILS LYKKE.

The Holy Virgin has grown infirm of late. Know you not what the monk of Wittenberg maintains?

NILS STENSSON.

Fie! how can you heed the monk of Wittenberg? Peter Kanzler says he is a heretic.

NILS LYKKE.

Well, let us not dispute the matter. Here can I show you a saint will serve full well to make oath by.

[*Points to a picture hanging on one of the panels.*

Come hither,—swear that you will be silent till I myself release your tongue—silent, as you hope for Heaven's salvation for yourself and for the man whose picture hangs there.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Approaching the picture.*] I swear it—so help me God's holy word!

[*Falls back a step in amazement.*

But—Christ save me——!

NILS LYKKE.

What now?

NILS STENSSON.

The picture—! Sure 'tis I myself!

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis old Sten Sture, even as he lived and moved in his youthful years.

NILS STENSSON.

Sten Sture!—And the likeness—? And—said you not I spoke the truth, when I called myself a Count's son? Was't not so?

NILS LYKKE.

So it was.

NILS STENSSON.

Ah, I have it, I have it! I am——

NILS LYKKE.

You are Sten Sture's son, good Sir!

NILS STENSSON.

[*With the quiet of amazement.*] *I* Sten Sture's son!

NILS LYKKE.

On the mother's side too your blood is noble. Peter Kanzler spoke not the truth, if he said that a poor peasant woman was your mother.

NILS STENSSON.

Oh strange! oh marvellous!—But can I believe——?

NILS LYKKE.

You may believe all that I tell you. But remember, all this will be merely your ruin, if you should forget what you swore to me by your father's salvation.

NILS STENSSON.

Forget it? Nay, that you may be sure I never shall.—But you, to whom I have given my word,—tell me—who are you?

NILS LYKKE.

My name is Nils Lykke.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Surprised.*] Nils Lykke? Surely not the Danish Councillor?

NILS LYKKE.

Even so.

NILS STENSSON.

And it was you—? 'Tis strange. How come you——?

NILS LYKKE.

——to be receiving missives from Peter Kanzler? You marvel at that?

NILS STENSSON.

I cannot deny it. He has ever named you as our bitterest foe——

NILS LYKKE.

And therefore you mistrust me?

NILS STENSSON.

Nay, not wholly that; but—well, the devil take musing!

NILS LYKKE.

Well said. Go but your own way, and you are as sure of the halter as you are of a Count's title and a chain of gold if you trust to me.

NILS STENSSON.

That will I. My hand upon it, dear Sir! Do you but help me with good counsel as long as there is need; when counsel gives place to blows, I shall look to myself.

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis well. Come with me now into yonder chamber, and I will tell you how all these matters stand, and what you have still to do.

[*Goes out to the right.*

NILS STENSSON.

[*With a glance at the picture.*] *I* Sten Sture's son! Oh, marvellous as a dream——!

[*Goes out after* NILS LYKKE.

ACT FOURTH

The Banquet Hall, as before, but without the supper-table.

BIÖRN, *the majordomo, enters carrying a lighted branch-candlestick, and lighting in* LADY INGER *and* OLAF SKAKTAVL *by the second door on the left.* LADY INGER *has a bundle of papers in her hand.*

LADY INGER.

[*To* BIÖRN.] And you are sure my daughter had speech with the knight, here in the hall?

BIÖRN.

[*Putting down the branch-candlestick on the table on the left.*] Sure as may be. I met her even as she stepped into the passage.

LADY INGER.

And she seemed greatly moved? Said you not so?

BIÖRN.

She looked all pale and disturbed. I asked if she were sick; she answered not, but said: "Go to my mother and tell her the knight sets forth from here ere daybreak; if she have letters

or messages for him, beg her not to delay him needlessly." And then she added somewhat that I heard not rightly.

LADY INGER.

Did you not hear it at all?

BIÖRN.

It sounded to me as though she said:—"Almost I fear he has already tarried too long at Östråt."

LADY INGER.

And the knight? Where is he?

BIÖRN.

In his chamber belike, in the gate-wing.

LADY INGER.

It is well. What I have to send by him is ready. Go to him and say I await him here in the hall. [BIÖRN *goes out to the right.*

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Know you, Lady Inger,—'tis true that in such things I am blind as a mole; yet seems it to me as though— —h'm!

LADY INGER.

Well?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

——as though Nils Lykke bore a mind to your daughter.

LADY INGER.

Then 'twould seem you are not so blind after all; for I am the more deceived if you be not right. Marked you not at the supper-board how eagerly he listened to the least word I let fall concerning Elina?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He forgot both food and drink.

LADY INGER.

And our secret affairs as well.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, and what is more—the papers from Peter Kanzler.

LADY INGER.

And from all this you conclude——?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

From all this I chiefly conclude that, as you know Nils Lykke and the name he bears, especially in all that touches women——

LADY INGER.

——I should be right glad to know him outside my gates?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay; and that as soon as may be.

LADY INGER.

[*Smiling.*] Nay—the case is just the contrary, Olaf Skaktavl!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

How mean you?

LADY INGER.

If things be as we both think, Nils Lykke must in nowise depart from Östråt yet awhile.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Looks at her with disapproval.*] Are you again embarked on crooked courses, Lady Inger? What guile are you now devising? Something that may increase your own power at the cost of our——

LADY INGER.

Oh this blindness, that makes you all do me such wrong! I see well you think I purpose to make Nils Lykke my daughter's husband. Were such a thought in my mind, why had I refused to take part in what is afoot in Sweden, when Nils Lykke and all the Danish crew seem willing to support it?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Then if it be not your wish to win him and bind him to you—what would you with him?

LADY INGER.

I will tell you in few words. In a letter to me, Nils Lykke has spoken of the high fortune it were to be allied to our house; and I do not say but, for a moment, I let myself think of the matter.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, see you!

LADY INGER.

To wed Nils Lykke to one of my house were doubtless a great step toward stanching many discords in our land.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Meseems your daughter Meretc's marriage with Vinzents Lunge might have taught you what comes of such a step. Scarce had my lord gained firm footing among us, when he began to make free with both our goods and our rights——

LADY INGER.

I know it even too well, Olaf Skaktavl! But times there be when my thoughts are manifold and strange. I cannot impart them fully either to you or to any one else. Often I know not the right course to choose. And yet—a second time to make a Danish lord my son-in-law,—nought but the uttermost need could drive me to that resource; and heaven be praised—things have not yet come to that!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

I am no wiser than before, Lady Inger;—why would you keep Nils Lykke at Östråt?

LADY INGER.

[*In a low voice.*] Because I owe him an undying hate. Nils Lykke has done me deadlier wrong than any other man. I cannot tell you wherein it lies; but never shall I rest till I am avenged on him. See you not now? Say that Nils Lykke were to love my daughter—as meseems were like enough. I will persuade him to tarry here; he shall learn to know Elina well. She is both fair and wise.—Ah, if he should one day come before me, with hot love in his heart, to beg for her hand! Then—to chase him away like a dog; to drive him off with jibes and scorn; to make it known over all the land that Nils Lykke had come a-wooing to Östråt in vain—! I tell you I would give ten years of my life but to see that day!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

In faith and truth, Inger Gyldenlöve—is this your purpose towards him?

LADY INGER.

This and nought else, as sure as God lives! Trust me, Olaf Skaktavl, I mean honestly by my countrymen; but I am in nowise my own mistress. Things there be that must be kept hidden, or 'twere my death-blow. But let me once be secure on that side, and you shall see

if I have forgotten the oath I swore by Knut Alfson's bier.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Shakes her by the hand.*] Thanks for those words! I am loath indeed to think evil of you. —Yet, touching your design towards this knight, methinks 'tis a venturesome game you would play. What if you had misreckoned? What if your daughter—? 'Tis said no woman can stand against this subtle devil.

LADY INGER.

My daughter? Think you that she—? Nay, have no fear of that; I know Elina better. All she has heard of his renown has but made her hate him the more. You saw with your own eyes——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, but—a woman's mind is shifting ground to build on. 'Twere best you looked well before you.

LADY INGER.

That will I, be sure; I will watch them narrowly. But even were he to succeed in luring her into his toils, I have but to whisper two words in her ear, and——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

What then?

LADY INGER.

——She will shrink from him as though he came straight from the foul Tempter himself.

Hist, Olaf Skaktavl! Here he comes. Now be cautious.

[NILS LYKKE *enters by the foremost door on the right.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Approaches* LADY INGER *courteously.*] My noble hostess has summoned me.

LADY INGER.

I have learned through my daughter that you are minded to leave us to-night.

NILS LYKKE.

Even so, to my sorrow;—since my business at Östråt is over.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Not before I have the papers.

NILS LYKKE.

True, true. I had well-nigh forgot the weightiest part of my errand. 'Twas the fault of our noble hostess. With such gracious skill did she keep her guests in talk at table——

LADY INGER.

That you no longer remembered what had brought you hither? I rejoice to hear it; for that was my design. Methought that if my guest, Nils Lykke, were to feel at his ease in Östråt, he must forget——

NILS LYKKE.

What, lady?

LADY INGER.

——First of all his errand—and then all that had gone before it.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To* OLAF SKAKTAVL, *as he takes out the packet and hands it to him.*] The papers from Peter Kanzler. You will find in them a full account of our partizans in Sweden.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

It is well.

[*Sits down by the table on the left, where he opens the packet and examines its contents.*

NILS LYKKE.

And now, Lady Inger Gyldenlöve,—I know not that there is aught else for me to do here.

LADY INGER.

Had it been things of state alone that brought us together, you might be right. But I should be loath to think so.

NILS LYKKE.

You would say——?

LADY INGER.

I would say that 'twas not alone as a Danish Councillor or as the ally of Peter Kanzler that

Nils Lykke came to be my guest.—Do I err in fancying that somewhat you may have heard down in Denmark may have made you curious to know more of the Lady of Östråt.

NILS LYKKE.

Far be it from me to deny——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Turning over the papers.*] Strange. No letter.

NILS LYKKE.

——Lady Inger Gyldenlöve's fame is all too widely spread that I should not long have been eager to see her face to face.

LADY INGER.

So I thought. But what, then, is an hour's jesting talk at the supper-table? Let us try to sweep away all that has till now lain between us; it may well come to pass that the Nils Lykke I know may wipe out the grudge I bore the one I knew not. Prolong your stay here but a few days, Sir Councillor! I dare not persuade Olaf Skaktavl thereto, since his secret charge in Sweden calls him hence. But as for you, doubtless your sagacity has placed all things beforehand in such train that your presence can scarce be needed. Trust me, your time shall not pass tediously with us; at least you will find both me and my daughter heartily disposed to do all in our power to pleasure you.

NILS LYKKE.

I doubt neither your goodwill towards me nor your daughter's; of that I have had ample proof. And I trust you will not doubt that my presence elsewhere must be vitally needful, since, despite of all, I must declare my longer stay at Östråt impossible.

LADY INGER.

Is it even so!—Know you, Sir Councillor, were I evilly minded, I might fancy you had come to Östråt to try a fall with me, and that, having lost, you cared not to linger on the battle-field among the witnesses of your defeat.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Smiling.*] There might be some show of reason for such a reading of the case; but sure it is that as yet *I* hold not the battle lost.

LADY INGER.

However that may be, it might at any rate be retrieved, if you would tarry some days with us. You see yourself, I am still halting and wavering at the parting of the ways,—persuading my redoubtable assailant not to quit the field. —Well, to speak plainly, the thing is this: your alliance with the disaffected in Sweden still seems to me somewhat—how shall I call it? —somewhat miraculous, Sir Councillor! I tell you this frankly, dear Sir! The thought that has moved the King's Council to this secret step is in truth most politic; but 'tis strangely at variance with the deeds of certain of your coun-

trymen in bygone years. Be not offended, then, if my trust in your fair promises needs to be somewhat strengthened ere I can place my whole welfare in your hands.

NILS LYKKE.

A longer stay at Östråt would scarce help towards that end; since I purpose not to make any further effort to shake your resolve.

LADY INGER.

Then must I pity you from my heart. Ay, Sir Councillor—'tis true I stand here an unfriended widow; yet may you trust my word when I foretell that this visit to Östråt will strew your future path with thorns.

NILS LYKKE.

[*With a smile.*] Is that your forecast, Lady Inger?

LADY INGER.

Truly it is! What can one say, dear Sir? 'Tis an age of tattling tongues. Many a scurril knave will make jeering rhymes at your expense. Ere half a year is out, you will be all men's fable; people will stop and gaze after you on the high roads; 'twill be: "Look, look; there rides Sir Nils Lykke, that fared north to Östråt to trap Inger Gyldenlöve, and was caught in his own nets."—Softly, softly, Sir Knight, why so impatient! 'Tis not that *I* think so; I do but forecast the thoughts of the malicious and evil-minded; and of them, alas! there are many.—

Ay, 'tis shame; but so it is—you will reap nought but mockery—mockery, because a woman was craftier than you. "Like a cunning fox," men will say, "he crept into Östråt; like a beaten hound he slunk away."—And one thing more: think you not that Peter Kanzler and his friends will forswear your alliance, when 'tis known that *I* venture not to fight under a standard borne by you?

NILS LYKKE.

You speak wisely, lady! Wherefore to secure me from mockery—and not to endanger the alliance with all our dear friends in Sweden—I must needs——

LADY INGER.

[*Hastily.*] ——prolong your stay at Östråt.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Who has been listening.*] He is in the trap!

NILS LYKKE.

No, my noble lady;—I must needs bring you to terms within this hour.

LADY INGER.

But what if you should fail?

NILS LYKKE.

I shall not fail.

LADY INGER.

You lack not confidence, it seems.

NILS LYKKE.

What shall be the wager that you make not common cause with myself and Peter Kanzler?

LADY INGER.

Östråt Castle against your knee-buckles!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Slaps his breast and cries:*] Olaf Skaktavl —here stands the master of Östråt!

LADY INGER.

Sir Councillor——!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Rises from the table.*] What now?

NILS LYKKE.

[*To* LADY INGER.] I accept not the wager; for in a moment you will gladly give Östråt Castle, and more to boot, to be freed from the snare wherein not I but you are tangled.

LADY INGER.

Your jest, Sir, grows a vastly merry one.

NILS LYKKE.

'Twill be merrier yet—at least for me. You boast that you have overreached me. You

threaten to heap on me all men's scorn and mockery. Ah, beware that you stir not up my vengefulness; for with two words I can bring you to your knees at my feet.

LADY INGER.

Ha-ha— —!

[*Stops suddenly, as if struck by a foreboding.*

And these two words, Nils Lykke?—these two words——?

NILS LYKKE.

——The secret of Sten Sture's son and yours.

LADY INGER.

[*With a shriek.*] Oh, God in heaven——!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Inger Gyldenlöve's son! What say you?

LADY INGER.

[*Half kneeling to* NILS LYKKE.] Mercy! oh, be merciful——!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Raises her up.*] Collect yourself, and let us talk together calmly.

LADY INGER.

[*In a low voice, as though bewildered.*] Did you hear it, Olaf Skaktavl? Or was it but a dream? Heard you what he said?

NILS LYKKE.

It was no dream, Lady Inger!

LADY INGER.

[*Clasping her hands.*] And you know it! You,—you!—Where is he then? Where have you got him? What would you do with him? [*Screams.*] Do not kill him, Nils Lykke! Give him back to me! Do not kill my child!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ah, I begin to understand——

LADY INGER.

And this fear—this torturing dread! Through all these weary years it has been ever with me ——and then all fails at last, and I must bear this agony!—Oh Lord my God, is it right of thee? Was it for this thou gavest him to me?

[*Controls herself and says with forced composure:*

Nils Lykke—tell me one thing. Where have you got him? Where is he?

NILS LYKKE.

With his foster-father.

LADY INGER.

Still with his foster-father. Oh, that merciless man—! For ever to deny me—. But it must not go on thus! Help me, Olaf Skaktavl!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

I?

NILS LYKKE.

There will be no need, if only you——

LADY INGER.

Hearken, Sir Councillor! What you know you shall know thoroughly. And you too, my old and faithful friend!

Listen then. To-night you bade me call to mind that fatal day when Knut Alfson was slain at Oslo. You bade me remember the promise I made as I stood by his corpse amid the bravest men in Norway. I was scarce full-grown then; but I felt God's strength in me, and methought, as many have thought since, that the Lord himself had set his mark on me and chosen me to fight in the forefront for my country's cause.

Was it pride of heart? Or was it a calling from on high? That I have never clearly known. But woe to whoso is charged with a mighty task.

For seven years I fear not to say that I kept my promise faithfully. I stood by my countrymen in all their sufferings and their need. Playmates of mine, all over the land, were wives and mothers now. I alone could give ear to no wooer—not to one. That you know best, Olaf Skaktavl!

Then I saw Sten Sture for the first time. Fairer man had never met my sight.

NILS LYKKE.

Ah, now it grows clear to me! Sten Sture was then in Norway on a secret errand. We Danes were not to know that he wished your friends well.

LADY INGER.

In the guise of a mean serving-man he lived a whole winter under one roof with me.

That winter I thought less and less of the country's weal.— — So fair a man had I never seen—and I had lived well-nigh five-and-twenty years.

Next autumn Sten Sture came once more; and when he departed again he took with him, in all secrecy, a little child. 'Twas not folk's evil tongues I feared; but our cause would have suffered had it got abroad that Sten Sture stood so near to me.

The child was given to Peter Kanzler to rear. I waited for better times, that were soon to come. They never came. Sten Sture took a wife two years later in Sweden, and, when he died, he left a widow——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

——And with her a lawful heir to his name and rights.

LADY INGER.

Time after time I wrote to Peter Kanzler beseeching him to give me back my child. But he was ever deaf to my prayer. "Cast in your lot with us once for all," he said, "and I send your son back to Norway; not before." B-4

'twas even that I dared not do. We of the disaffected party were then ill regarded by many timorous folk in the land. Had these learnt how things stood—oh, I know it!—to cripple the mother they had gladly meted to the child the fate that would have been King Christiern's had he not saved himself by flight.[1]

But, besides that, the Danes, too, were active. They spared neither threats nor promises to force me to join them.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Twas but reason. The eyes of all men were fixed on you as on the vane that should show them how to shape their course.

LADY INGER.

Then came Herlof Hyttefad's rising. Do you remember that time, Olaf Skaktavl? Was it not as though a new spring had dawned over the whole land! Mighty voices summoned me to come forth;—yet I dared not. I stood doubting—far from the strife—in my lonely castle. At times it seemed as though the Lord God himself were calling me; but then would come the killing dread again to benumb my will.

[1] King Christian II. of Denmark (the perpetrator of the massacre at Stockholm known as the Blood-Bath) fled to Holland in 1523, five years before the date assigned to this play, in order to escape death or imprisonment at the hands of his rebellious nobles, who summoned his uncle, Frederick I., to the throne. Returning to Denmark in 1532, Christian was thrown into prison, where he spent the last twenty-seven years of his life.

"Who will win?"—that was the question that was ever ringing in my ears.

'Twas but a short spring that had come to Norway. Herlof Hyttefad, and many more with him, were broken on the wheel during the months that followed. None could call me to account; yet there lacked not covert threats from Denmark. What if they knew the secret? At last methought they must know; I knew not how else to understand their words.

'Twas even in that time of agony that Gyldenlöve, the High Steward, came hither and sought me in marriage. Let any mother anguished for her child think herself in my place! —A month after, I was the High Steward's wife —and homeless in the hearts of my countrymen.

Then came the quiet years. No one raised his head any more. Our masters might grind us down even as heavily as they listed. There were times when I loathed myself; for what had I to do? Nought but to endure terror and scorn and bring forth daughters into the world. My daughters! God must forgive me if I have had no mother's heart towards them. My wifely duties were as serfdom to me; how then could I love my daughters? Oh, how different with my son! He was the child of my very soul. He was the one thing that brought to mind the time when I was a woman and nought but a woman.—And him they had taken from me! He was growing up among strangers, who might, mayhap, be sowing in him the seed of corruption! Olaf Skaktavl—had I wandered, like you, on the lonely hills, hunted and forsaken, in win-

ter and storm—if I had but held my child in my arms,—trust me, I had not sorrowed and wept so sore as I have sorrowed and wept for him from his birth even to this hour!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

There is my hand. I have judged you too hardly, Lady Inger! Command me even as before; I will obey.—Ay, by all the saints, I know what it is to sorrow for a child.

LADY INGER.

Yours was slain by men of blood. But what is death to the restless terror of all these long years?

NILS LYKKE.

Mark, then—'tis in your power to end this terror. You have but to make peace between the jarring factions, and neither will think of seizing on your child as a pledge of your faith.

LADY INGER.

[*To herself.*] This is the vengeance of Heaven. [*Looks at him.*] In one word, what do you demand?

NILS LYKKE.

I demand first that you shall call the people of the northern districts to arms, in support of the disaffected in Sweden.

LADY INGER.

And next——?

NILS LYKKE.

——that you do your best to advance young Count Sture's ancestral claim to the throne of Sweden.

LADY INGER.

His? You demand that I——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Softly.*] It is the wish of many Swedes, and 'twould serve our turn too.

NILS LYKKE.

You hesitate, lady? You tremble for your son's safety. What better can you wish than to see his half-brother on the throne?

LADY INGER.

[*In thought.*] True—true——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Looks at her sharply.*] Unless there be other plans afoot——

LADY INGER.

What mean you?

NILS LYKKE.

Inger Gyldenlöve might have a mind to be—a king's mother.

LADY INGER.

No, no! Give me back my child, and let who will have the crowns.

But know you so surely that Count Sture is willing——?

NILS LYKKE.

Of that he will himself assure you.

LADY INGER.

Himself? And when?

NILS LYKKE.

Even now.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

How now?

LADY INGER.

What say you?

NILS LYKKE.

In one word, Count Sture is in Östråt.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Here?

NILS LYKKE.

[*To* LADY INGER.] You have doubtless heard that another rode through the gate along with me? The Count was my attendant.

LADY INGER.

[*Softly.*] I am in his power. I have no longer any choice.

[*Looks at him and says:*

'Tis well, Sir Councillor—you shall have full assurance of my support.

NILS LYKKE.

In writing?

LADY INGER.

As you will.

[*Goes to the table on the left, sits down, and takes writing materials from the drawer.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside, standing by the table on the right.*] At last, then, I win!

LADY INGER.

[*After a moment's thought, turns suddenly in her chair to* OLAF SKAKTAVL *and whispers.*] Olaf Skaktavl—I am certain of it now—Nils Lykke is a traitor!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Softly.*] What? You think——?

LADY INGER.

He has treachery in his heart.

[*Lays the paper before her and dips the pen in the ink.*

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

And yet you would give him a written promise that may be your ruin?

LADY INGER.

Hush; leave me to act. Nay, wait and listen first—— [*Talks with him in a whisper.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly, watching them.*] Ah, take counsel together as much as ye list! All danger is over now. With her written consent in my pocket, I can denounce her whenever I please. A secret message to Jens Bielke this very night—. I tell him but the truth—that the young Count Sture is not at Östråt. And then to-morrow, when the road is open—to Trondhiem with my young friend, and thence by ship to Copenhagen with him as my prisoner. Once we have him safe in the castle-tower, we can dictate to Lady Inger what terms we will. And I—? After this, methinks, the King will scarce place the French mission in other hands than mine.

LADY INGER.

[*Still whispering to* OLAF SKAKTAVL.] Well, you understand me?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ay, fully. Let us make the venture, even as you will. [*Goes out by the back, to the right.*

[NILS STENSSON *comes in by the first door on the right, unseen by* LADY INGER, *who has begun to write.*

NILS STENSSON.

[*In a low voice.*] Sir Knight,—Sir Knight!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Moves towards him.*] Rash boy! What would you here? Said I not you should wait within until I called you?

NILS STENSSON.

How could I? Now you have told me that Inger Gyldenlöve is my mother, I thirst more than ever to see her face to face——

Oh, it is she! How proud and high her mien! Even thus did I ever picture her. Fear not, dear Sir,—I shall do nought rashly. Since I have learnt this secret, I feel, as it were, older and wiser. I will no longer be wild and heedless; I will be even as other well-born youths.—Tell me,—knows she that I am here? Surely you have prepared her?

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, sure enough; but——

NILS STENSSON.

Well?

NILS LYKKE.

——She will not own you for her son.

NILS STENSSON.

Will not own me? But she is my mother.—Oh, if it be that she doubts that—[*takes out a ring which he wears on a cord round his neck*]—show her this ring. I have worn it since my earliest childhood; she must surely know its history.

NILS LYKKE.

Hide the ring, man! Hide it, I say!

You mistake me. Lady Inger doubts not at all that you are her child; but—ay, look about you; look at all this wealth; look at these mighty forefathers and kinsmen whose pictures deck the walls both high and low; look lastly at herself, the haughty dame, used to bear sway as the first noblewoman in the kingdom. Think you it can be to her mind to take a poor ignorant youth by the hand before all men's eyes and say: Behold my son!

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, doubtless you are right. I am poor and ignorant. I have nought to offer her in return for what I crave. Oh, never have I felt my poverty weigh on me till this hour! But tell me —what think you I should do to win her favour? Tell me, dear Sir; sure you must know!

NILS LYKKE.

You must win your father's kingdom. But until that may be, look well that you wound not her ears by hinting at kinship or the like. She will bear her as though she believed you to be the real Count Sture, until you have made yourself worthy to be called her son.

NILS STENSSON.

Oh, but tell me——!

NILS LYKKE.

Hush; hush!

LADY INGER.

[*Rises and hands him a paper.*] Sir Knight —here is my promise.

NILS LYKKE.

I thank you.

LADY INGER.

[*Notices* NILS STENSSON.] Ah,—this young man is——?

NILS LYKKE.

Ay, Lady Inger, he is Count Sture.

LADY INGER.

[*Aside, looks at him stealthily.*] Feature for feature;—ay, by God,—it is Sten Sture's son!

[*Approaches him and says with cold courtesy:*

I bid you welcome under my roof, Count! It rests with you whether or not we shall bless this meeting a year hence.

NILS STENSSON.

With me? Oh, do but tell me what I must do! Trust me I have both courage and will——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Listens uneasily.*] What is this noise and uproar, Lady Inger? There are people pressing hitherward. What does this mean?

LADY INGER.

[*In a loud voice.*] 'Tis the spirits awaking!

[OLAF SKAKTAVL, EINAR HUK, BIÖRN, FINN, *and a number of* PEASANTS *and* RETAINERS *come in from the back, on the right.*

THE PEASANTS AND RETAINERS.

Hail to Lady Inger Gyldenlöve!

LADY INGER.

[*To* OLAF SKAKTAVL.] Have you told them what is afoot?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

I have told them all they need to know.

LADY INGER.

[*To the* CROWD.] Ay, now, my faithful house-folk and peasants, now must ye arm you as best you can and will. That which earlier to-night I forbade you, ye have now my fullest leave to do. And here I present to you the young Count Sture, the coming ruler of Sweden —and Norway too, if God will it so.

THE WHOLE CROWD.

Hail to him! Hail to Count Sture!

[*General excitement. The* PEASANTS *and* RETAINERS *choose out weapons and put on breastplates and helmets, amid great noise.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly and uneasily.*] The spirits awaking, she said? I but feigned to conjure up the devil of revolt—'twere a cursed spite if he got the upper hand of us.

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS STENSSON.] Here I give you the first earnest of our service—thirty mounted men, to follow you as a bodyguard. Trust me—ere you reach the frontier many hundreds will have ranged themselves under my banner and yours. Go, then, and God be with you!

NILS STENSSON.

Thanks,—Inger Gyldenlöve! Thanks—and be sure you shall never have cause to shame you for—for Count Sture! If you see me again, I shall have won my father's kingdom.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] Ay, if she see you again!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

The horses wait, good fellows! Are ye ready——?

THE PEASANTS.

Ay, ay, ay!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Uneasily, to* LADY INGER.] What? You mean not to-night, even now——?

LADY INGER.

This very moment, Sir Knight!

NILS LYKKE.

Nay, nay, impossible!

LADY INGER.

I have said it.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Softly, to* NILS STENSSON.] Obey her not!

NILS STENSSON.

How can I do aught else? I will; I must!

NILS LYKKE.

But 'tis your certain ruin——

NILS STENSSON.

What then! Her must I obey in all things——

NILS LYKKE.

[*With authority.*] And me?

NILS STENSSON.

I shall keep my word; be sure of that. The secret shall not pass my lips till you yourself release me. But she is my mother!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] And Jens Bielke in wait on the

road! Damnation! He will snatch the prize out of my fingers——

[*To* LADY INGER.

Wait till to-morrow!

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS STENSSON.] Count Sture—do you obey me or not?

NILS STENSSON.

To horse!

[*Goes up towards the background.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] Unhappy boy! He knows not what he does.

[*To* LADY INGER.

Well, since so it must be,—farewell!

[*Bows hastily, and begins to move away.*

LADY INGER.

[*Detains him.*] Nay, stay! Not so, Sir Knight,—not so!

NILS LYKKE.

What mean you?

LADY INGER.

[*In a low voice.*] Nils Lykke—you are a traitor! Hush! Let no one see there is discord in the camp of the leaders. You have won Peter Kanzler's trust by some devilish wile that as yet is dark to me. You have forced me to

rebellious acts—not to help our cause, but to further your own plots, whatever they may be. I can draw back no more. But think not therefore that you have conquered! I shall know how to make you harmless——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Lays his hand involuntarily on his sword.*] Lady Inger!

LADY INGER.

Be calm, Sir Councillor! Your life is safe. But you come not outside the gates of Östråt before victory is ours.

NILS LYKKE.

Death and destruction!

LADY INGER.

It boots not to resist. You come not from this place. So rest you quiet; 'tis your wisest course.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] Ah,—I am overreached. She has been craftier than I. [*A thought strikes him.*] But if I yet——?

LADY INGER.

[*To* OLAF SKAKTAVL.] Ride with Count Sture's troops to the frontier; then without pause to Peter Kanzler, and bring me back my child.

Now has he no longer any plea for keeping from me what is my own.

[*Adds, as* OLAF SKAKTAVL *is going:*

Wait; a token—. He that wears Sten Sture's ring, he is my son.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

By all the saints, you shall have him!

LADY INGER.

Thanks,—thanks, my faithful friend!

NILS LYKKE.

[*To* FINN, *whom he has beckoned to him unobserved, and with whom he has been whispering.*] Good—now contrive to slip out. Let none see you. The Swedes are in ambush half a league hence. Tell the commander that Count Sture is dead. The young man you see there must on no account be touched. Tell the commander so. Tell him the boy's life is worth thousands to me.

FINN.

It shall be done.

LADY INGER.

[*Who has meanwhile been watching* NILS LYKKE.] And now go, all of you, and God be with you! [*Points to* NILS LYKKE.] This noble knight cannot find it in his heart to leave his friends at Östråt so hastily. He will abide here with me till the tidings of your victory arrive.

NILS LYKKE.

[*To himself.*] Devil!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Seizes his hand.*] Trust me—you shall not have long to wait!

NILS LYKKE.

It is well; it is well! [*Aside.*] All may yet be saved. If only my message reach Jens Bielke in time——

LADY INGER.

[*To* EINAR HUK, *the bailiff, pointing to* FINN.] And let that man be placed under close guard in the castle dungeon.

FINN.

Me?

THE BAILIFF AND THE SERVANTS.

Finn!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside.*] My last anchor gone!

LADY INGER.

[*Imperatively.*] To the dungeon with him!

[EINAR HUK, BIÖRN, *and a couple of the house-servants lead* FINN *out to the left.*

ALL THE REST.

[*Except* NILS LYKKE, *rushing out to the right.*] Away! To horse,—to horse! Hail to Lady Inger Gyldenlöve!

LADY INGER.

[*Passing close to* NILS LYKKE *as she goes out after the others.*] Who wins?

NILS LYKKE.

[*Remains alone.*] Who? Ay, woe to you; —your victory will cost you dear. *I* wash my hands of it. 'Tis not *I* that am murdering him.

But my prey is escaping me none the less; and the revolt will grow and spread!—Ah, 'tis a foolhardy, a frantic game I have here taken in hand!

[*Listens at the window.*

There they ride clattering out through the gateway.—Now 'tis closed after them—and I am left here a prisoner.

No way of escape! Within half-an-hour the Swedes will be upon him. He has thirty well-armed horsemen with him. 'Twill be life or death.

But if, after all, they should take him alive? —Were I but free, I could overtake the Swedes ere they reach the frontier, and make them deliver him up. [*Goes towards the window in the background and looks out.*] Damnation! Guards outside on every hand. Can there be no way of escape?

[*Comes quickly forward again; suddenly stops and listens.*

What is that? Music and singing. It seems to come from Elina's chamber. Ay, 'tis she that is singing. Then she is still awake——

[*A thought seems to strike him.*

Elina!—Ah, if that could be! Were it possible to— And why should I not? Am I not still myself? Says not the song:—

Fair maidens a-many they sigh and they pine:
"Ah God, that Nils Lykke were mine, mine, mine."

And she—? ——Elina Gyldenlöve shall set me free!

[*Goes quickly but stealthily towards the first door on the left.*

ACT FIFTH

The Banquet Hall. It is still night. The hall is but dimly lighted by a branch-candlestick on the table, in front, on the right.

LADY INGER *is sitting by the table, deep in thought.*

LADY INGER.

[*After a pause.*] They call me keen-witted beyond all others in the land. I believe they are right. The keenest-witted— No one knows how I became so. For more than twenty years I have fought to save my child. That is the key to the riddle. Ay, that sharpens the wits!

My wits? Where have they flown to-night? What has become of my forethought? There is a ringing and rushing in my ears. I see shapes before me, so lifelike that methinks I could lay hold on them.

[*Springs up.*

Lord Jesus—what is this? Am I no longer mistress of my reason? Is it to come to that——?

[*Presses her clasped hands over her head; sits down again, and says more calmly:*

Nay, 'tis nought. 'Twill pass. There is no fear;—it will pass.

How peaceful it is in the hall to-night! No

threatening looks from forefathers or kinsfolk. No need to turn their faces to the wall.

[*Rises again.*

Ay, 'twas well that I took heart at last. We shall conquer;—and then am I at the goal of all my longings. I shall have my child again.

[*Takes up the light as if to go, but stops and says musingly:*

At the goal? The goal? To have him back? Is that all?—is there nought further?

[*Sets the light down on the table.*

That heedless word that Nils Lykke threw forth at random—. How could he see my unborn thought?

[*More softly.*

A king's mother? A king's mother, he said—And why not? Have not my fathers before me ruled as kings, even though they bore not the kingly name? Has not my son as good a title as the other to the rights of the house of Sture? In the sight of God he has—if so be there is justice in Heaven.

And in an hour of terror I have signed away his rights. I have recklessly squandered them, as a ransom for his freedom.

If they could be recovered?—Would Heaven be angered, if I—? Would it call down fresh troubles on my head if I were to—? Who knows;—who knows! It may be safest to refrain. [*Takes up the light again.*] I shall have my child again. That must content me. I will try to rest. All these desperate thoughts,—I will sleep them away.

[*Goes towards the back, but stops in the middle of the hall, and says broodingly:*

A king's mother!

[*Goes slowly out at the back, to the left.*

[*After a short pause,* NILS LYKKE *and* ELINA GYLDENLÖVE *enter noiselessly by the first door on the left.* NILS LYKKE *has a small lantern in his hand.*

NILS LYKKE.

[*Throws the light from his lantern around, so as to search the room.*] All is still. I must begone.

ELINA.

Oh, let me look but once more into your eyes, before you leave me.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Embraces her.*] Elina!

ELINA.

[*After a short pause.*] Will you come nevermore to Östråt?

NILS LYKKE.

How can you doubt that I will come? Are you not henceforth my betrothed?—But will you be true to me, Elina? Will you not forget me ere we meet again?

ELINA.

Do you ask if I will be true? Have I any will left then? Have I power to be untrue to

you, even if I would?—You came by night; you knocked upon my door;—and I opened to you. You spoke to me. What was it you said? You gazed in my eyes. What was the mystic might that turned my brain, and lured me as into a magic net? [*Hides her face on his shoulder.*] Oh, look not on me, Nils Lykke! You must not look upon me after this— True, say you? Do you not own me? I am yours;—I must be yours—to all eternity.

NILS LYKKE.

Now, by my knightly honour, ere the year be past, you shall sit as my wife in the hall of my fathers!

ELINA.

No vows, Nils Lykke! No oaths to me.

NILS LYKKE.

What ails you? Why do you shake your head so mournfully?

ELINA.

Because I know that the same soft words wherewith you turned my brain, you have whispered to so many a one before. Nay, nay, be not angry, my beloved! In nowise do I reproach you, as I did while yet I knew you not. Now I understand how high above all others is your goal. How can love be aught to you but a pastime, or woman but a toy?

NILS LYKKE.

Elina,—hear me!

ELINA.

As I grew up, your name was ever in my ears. I hated the name, for meseemed that all women were dishonoured by your life. And yet,—how strange!—when I built up in my dreams the life that should be mine, you were ever my hero, though I knew it not. Now I understand it all. What was it that I felt? It was a foreboding, a mysterious longing for you, you only one—for you that were one day to come and reveal to me all the glory of life.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Aside, putting down the lantern on the table.*] How is it with me? This dizzy fascination—. If this it be to love, then have I never known it till this hour.—Is there not yet time—? Oh horror—Lucia! [*Sinks into the chair.*

ELINA.

What is amiss with you? So heavy a sigh——

NILS LYKKE.

O, 'tis nought,—nought!

Elina,—now will I confess all to you. I have beguiled many with both words and glances; I have said to many a one what I whispered to you this night. But trust me——

ELINA.

Hush! No more of that. My love is no exchange for that you give me. No, no; I love you because your every glance commands it like a king's decree. [*Lies down at his feet.*

Oh, let me once more stamp that kingly mandate deep into my soul, though well I know it stands imprinted there for all time and eternity.

Dear God—how little I have known myself! 'Twas but to-night I said to my mother: "My pride is my life." And what is now my pride? Is it to know my countrymen free, or my house held in honour throughout many lands? Oh, no, no! My love is my pride. The little dog is proud when he may sit by his master's feet and eat bread-crumbs from his hand. Even so am I proud, so long as I may sit at your feet, while your looks and your words nourish me with the bread of life. See, therefore, I say to you, even as I said but now to my mother: "My love is my life;" for therein lies all my pride, now and evermore.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Raises her up on his lap.*] Nay, nay—not at my feet, but at my side is your place,—how high soever fate may exalt me. Ay, Elina—you have led me into a better path; and should it one day be granted me to atone by a deed of fame for the sins of my reckless youth, then shall the honour be yours and mine together.

ELINA.

Ah, you speak as though I were still that Elina who but this evening flung down the flowers at your feet.

I have read in my books of the many-coloured life in far-off lands. To the winding of horns, the knight rides forth into the greenwood, with

his falcon on his wrist. Even so do you go your way through life;—your name rings out before you whithersoever you fare.—All that *I* desire of the glory, is to rest like the falcon on your arm. Like him was I, too, blind to light and life, till you loosed the hood from my eyes and set me soaring high over the tree-tops.—But trust me—bold as my flight may be, yet shall I ever turn back to my cage.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Rises.*] Then will I bid defiance to the past! See now;—take this ring, and be mine before God and men—mine,—ay, though it should trouble the dreams of the dead.

ELINA.

You make me tremble. What is it that——?

NILS LYKKE.

'Tis nought. Come, let me place the ring on your finger.—Even so—now are you my betrothed!

ELINA.

I Nils Lykke's bride! It seems but a dream, all that has befallen this night. Oh, but so fair a dream! My breast is so light. No longer is there bitterness and hatred in my soul. I will atone to all whom I have wronged. I have been unloving to my mother. To-morrow will I go to her; she must forgive me where I have erred.

NILS LYKKE.

And give her consent to our bond.

ELINA.

That will she. Oh, I am sure she will. My mother is kind; all the world is kind;—I can no longer feel hatred for any living soul—save one.

NILS LYKKE.

Save one?

ELINA.

Ah, 'tis a mournful history. I had a sister——

NILS LYKKE.

Lucia?

ELINA.

Did you know Lucia?

NILS LYKKE.

No, no; I have but heard her name.

ELINA.

She too gave her heart to a knight. He betrayed her;—now she is in Heaven.

NILS LYKKE.

And you——

ELINA.

I hate him.

NILS LYKKE.

Hate him not! If there be mercy in your heart, forgive him his sin. Trust me, he bears his punishment in his own breast.

ELINA.

Him will I never forgive! I cannot, even if I would; for I have sworn so dear an oath——

[*Listening.*

Hush! Can you hear——?

NILS LYKKE.

What? Where?

ELINA.

Without; far off. The noise of many horsemen on the high-road.

NILS LYKKE.

Ah, 'tis they! And I had forgotten—! They are coming hither. Then is the danger great! I must begone!

ELINA.

But whither? Oh, Nils Lykke, what are you hiding——?

NILS LYKKE.

Tomorrow, Elina—; for as God lives, I will return tomorrow.—Quickly now—where is the secret passage whereof you told me?

ELINA.

Through the grave-vault. See,—here is the trap-door——

NILS LYKKE.

The grave-vault! [*To himself.*] No matter, he must be saved!

ELINA.

[*By the window.*] The horsemen have reached the gate—— [*Hands him the lantern.*

NILS LYKKE.

Oh, then—— [*Begins to descend.*

ELINA.

Go forward along the passage till you reach the coffin with the death's-head and the black cross; it is Lucia's——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Climbs back hastily and shuts the trap-door.*] Lucia's! Pah——!

ELINA.

What said you?

NILS LYKKE.

Nay, nothing. 'Twas the air of the graves that made me dizzy.

ELINA.

Hark; they are hammering at the gate!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Lets the lantern fall.*] Ah! too late——!

[BIÖRN *enters hurriedly from the right, carrying a light.*

ELINA.

[*Goes towards him.*] What is amiss, Biörn? What is it?

BIÖRN.

An ambuscade! Count Sture——

ELINA.

Count Sture? What of him?

NILS LYKKE.

Have they killed him?

BIÖRN.

[*To* ELINA.] Where is your mother?

TWO RETAINERS.

[*Rushing in from the right.*] Lady Inger! Lady Inger!

[LADY INGER GYLDENLÖVE *enters by the furthest back door on the left, with a branch-candlestick, lighted, in her hand, and says quickly:*

LADY INGER.

I know all. Down with you to the courtyard! Keep the gate open for our friends, but closed against all others!

[*Puts down the candlestick on the table to the left.* BIÖRN *and the two* RETAINERS *go out again to the right.*

LADY INGER.

[*To* NILS LYKKE.] So that was the trap, Sir Councillor!

NILS LYKKE.

Inger Gyldenlöve, believe me——!

LADY INGER.

An ambuscade that was to snap him up as soon as you had secured the promise that should destroy me!

NILS LYKKE.

[*Takes out the paper and tears it to pieces.*] There is your promise. I keep nothing that can bear witness against you.

LADY INGER.

What is this?

NILS LYKKE.

From this hour will I put your thoughts of me to shame. If I have sinned against you,—by Heaven I will strive to repair my crime. But now I must out, if I have to hew my way through the gate!—Elina—tell your mother all! —And you, Lady Inger, let our reckoning be forgotten! Be generous—and silent! Trust me, ere dawn of day you shall owe me a life's gratitude. [*Goes out quickly to the right.*

LADY INGER.

[*Looks after him with exultation.*] 'Tis well! I understand him.

[*Turns to* ELINA.

Nils Lykke—? Well——?

ELINA.

He knocked upon my door, and set this ring upon my finger.

LADY INGER.

And from his soul he holds you dear?

ELINA.

He has said so, and I believe him.

LADY INGER.

Bravely done, Elina! Ha-ha, Sir Knight, now is it my turn!

ELINA.

My mother—you are so strange. Ah, yes—I know—'tis my unloving ways that have angered you.

LADY INGER.

Not so, dear Elina! You are an obedient child. You have opened your door to him; you have hearkened to his soft words. I know full well what it must have cost you; for I know your hatred——

ELINA.

But, my mother——

LADY INGER.

Hush! We have played into each other's hands. What wiles did you use, my subtle daughter? I saw the love shine out of his eyes. Hold him fast now! Draw the net closer and

closer about him; and then— Ah, Elina, if we could but rend asunder his perjured heart within his breast!

ELINA.

Woe is me—what is it you say?

LADY INGER.

Let not your courage fail you. Hearken to me. I know a word that will keep you firm. Know then— [*Listening.*] They are fighting before the gate. Courage! Now comes the pinch! [*Turns again to* ELINA.] Know then: Nils Lykke was the man that brought your sister to her grave.

ELINA.

[*With a shriek.*] Lucia!

LADY INGER.

He it was, as truly as there is an Avenger above us!

ELINA.

Then Heaven be with me!

LADY INGER.

[*Appalled.*] Elina——?!

ELINA.

I am his bride in the sight of God.

LADY INGER.

Unhappy child,—what have you done?

ELINA.

[*In a toneless voice.*] Made shipwreck of my soul.—Good-night, my mother!

[*She goes out to the left.*

LADY INGER.

Ha-ha-ha! It goes down-hill apace with Inger Gyldenlöve's house. There went the last of my daughters.

Why could I not keep silence? Had she known nought, it may be she had been happy —after a kind.

It was to be so. It is written up yonder in the stars that I am to break off one green branch after another till the trunk stand leafless at last.

'Tis well, 'tis well! I shall have my son again. Of the others, of my daughters, I will not think.

My reckoning? To face my reckoning?—It falls not due till the last great day of wrath.—That comes not yet awhile.

NILS STENSSON.

[*Calling from outside on the right.*] Ho—shut the gate!

LADY INGER.

Count Sture's voice——!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Rushes in, unarmed, and with his clothes torn, and shouts with a laugh of desperation.*] Well met again, Inger Gyldenlöve!

LADY INGER.

What have you lost?

NILS STENSSON.

My kingdom and my life!

LADY INGER.

And the peasants? My servants?—where are they?

NILS STENSSON.

You will find the carcasses along the highway. Who has the rest, I cannot tell you.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Outside on the right.*] Count Sture! Where are you?

NILS STENSSON.

Here, here!

[OLAF SKAKTAVL *comes in with his right hand wrapped in a clout.*

LADY INGER.

Alas, Olaf Skaktavl, you too——!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

'Twas impossible to break through.

LADY INGER.

You are wounded, I see!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

A finger the less; that is all.

NILS STENSSON.

Where are the Swedes?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

At our heels. They are breaking open the gate——

NILS STENSSON.

Oh, God! No, no! I cannot—I will not die.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

A hiding-place, Lady Inger! Is there no corner where we can hide him?

LADY INGER.

But if they search the castle——?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, ay; they will find me! And then to be dragged away to prison, or be strung up——! No, no, Inger Gyldenlöve,—I know full well,—you will never suffer that to be!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

[*Listening.*] There burst the lock.

LADY INGER.

[*At the window.*] Many men rush in at the gateway.

NILS STENSSON.

And to lose my life now! Now, when my true life was but beginning! Now, when I have so lately learnt that I have aught to live for.

No, no, no!—Think not I am a coward, Inger Gyldenlöve! Might I but have time to show——

LADY INGER.

I hear them now in the hall below.

[*Firmly to* OLAF SKAKTAVL.

He must be saved—cost what it will!

NILS STENSSON.

[*Seizes her hand.*] Oh, I knew it;—you are noble and good!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

But how? Since we cannot hide him——

NILS STENSSON.

Ah, I have it! I have it! The secret——!

LADY INGER.

The secret?

NILS STENSSON.

Even so; yours and mine!

LADY INGER.

Merciful Heaven—you know it?

NILS STENSSON.

From first to last. And now when 'tis life or death— Where is Nils Lykke?

LADY INGER.

Fled.

NILS STENSSON.

Fled? Then God help me; for he alone can unseal my lips.—But what is a promise against a life! When the Swedish captain comes——

LADY INGER.

What then? What will you do?

NILS STENSSON.

Purchase life and freedom;—tell him all.

LADY INGER.

Oh no, no;—be merciful!

NILS STENSSON.

Nought else can save me. When I have told him what I know——

LADY INGER.

[*Looks at him with suppressed agitation.*] You will be safe?

NILS STENSSON.

Ay, safe! Nils Lykke will speak for me. You see, 'tis the last resource.

LADY INGER.

[*Composedly, with emphasis.*] The last resource? Right, right—the last resource all are free to try. [*Points to the left.*] See, meanwhile you can hide in there.

NILS STENSSON.

[*In a low voice.*] Trust me—you will never repent of this.

LADY INGER.

[*Half to herself.*] God grant that you speak the truth!

[NILS STENSSON *goes out hastily by the furthest door on the left.* OLAF SKAKTAVL *is following; but* LADY INGER *detains him.*

LADY INGER.

Did you understand his meaning?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

The dastard! He would betray your secret. He would sacrifice your son to save himself.

LADY INGER.

When life is at stake, he said, we must try the last resource.—'Tis well, Olaf Skaktavl,—let it be as he has said!

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

What mean you?

LADY INGER.

Life against life! One of them must perish.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Ah—you would——?

LADY INGER.

If we close not the lips of him that is within ere he come to speech with the Swedish captain, then is my son lost to me. But if, on the other hand, he be swept from my path, when the time comes I can claim all his rights for my own child. Then shall you see that Inger Ottis' daughter has metal in her yet. Of this be assured—you shall not have long to wait for the vengeance you have thirsted after for twenty years.—Hark! They are coming up the stairs! Olaf Skaktavl,—it lies with you whether tomorrow I shall be no more than a childless woman, or——

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

So be it! I have yet one sound hand left. [*Gives her his hand.*] Inger Gyldenlöve—your name shall not die out through me.

[*Follows* NILS STENSSON *into the inner room.*

LADY INGER.

[*Pale and trembling.*] But dare I——?

[*A noise is heard in the room; she rushes with a scream towards the door.*

No, no,—it must not be!

[*A heavy fall is heard within; she covers her ears with her hands and hurries back across the hall with a wild look. After a pause she takes her hands cautiously away, listens again, and says softly:*

Now it is over. All is still within——

Thou sawest it, God—I repented me! But Olaf Skaktavl was too swift of hand.

[OLAF SKAKTAVL *comes silently into the hall.*

LADY INGER.

[*After a pause, without looking at him.*] Is it done?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

You need fear him no more; he will betray no one.

LADY INGER.

[*As before.*] Then he is dumb?

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

Six inches of steel in his breast. I felled him with my left hand.

LADY INGER.

Ay, ay—the right was too good for such work.

OLAF SKAKTAVL.

That is your affair;—the thought was yours. —And now to Sweden! Peace be with you meanwhile! When next we meet at Östråt, I shall bring another with me.

[*Goes out by the furthest door on the right.*

LADY INGER.

Blood on my hands. Then 'twas to come to that!—He begins to be dear-bought now.

[BIÖRN *comes in, with a number of Swedish* MEN-AT-ARMS, *by the first door on the right.*

ONE OF THE MEN-AT-ARMS.

Pardon, if you are the lady of the house——

LADY INGER.

Is it Count Sture ye seek?

THE MAN-AT-ARMS.

The same.

LADY INGER.

Then you are on the right track. The Count has sought refuge with me.

THE MAN-AT-ARMS.

Refuge? Pardon, my noble lady,—you have no power to harbour him; for——

LADY INGER.

That the Count himself has doubtless understood; and therefore he has—ay, look for yourselves—therefore he has taken his own life.

THE MAN-AT-ARMS.

His own life!

LADY INGER.

Look for yourselves, I say. You will find the corpse within there. And since he already stands before another judge, it is my prayer that he may be borne hence with all the honour that beseems his noble birth.—Biörn, you know my own coffin has stood ready this many a year

in the secret chamber. [*To the* MEN-AT-ARMS.] I pray that in it you will bear Count Sture's body to Sweden.

THE MAN-AT-ARMS.

It shall be as you command. [*To one of the others.*] Haste with these tidings to Jens Bielke. He holds the road with the rest of the troop. We others must in and——

[*One of the* MEN-AT-ARMS *goes out to the right; the others go with* BIÖRN *into the room on the left.*

LADY INGER.

[*Moves about for a time in uneasy silence.*] If Count Sture had not taken such hurried leave of the world, within a month he had hung on a gallows, or had lain for all his days in a dungeon. Had he been better served with such a lot?

Or else he had bought his life by betraying my child into the hands of my foes. Is it *I*, then, that have slain him? Does not even the wolf defend her cubs? Who dare condemn me for striking my claws into him that would have reft me of my flesh and blood?—It had to be. No mother but would have done even as I.

But 'tis no time for idle musings now. I must to work.

[*Sits down by the table on the left.*

I will write to all my friends throughout the land. They must rise as one man to support

the great cause. A new king,—regent first, and then king——

[*Begins to write, but falls into thought, and says softly:*

Who will be chosen in the dead man's place?—A king's mother—? 'Tis a fair word. It has but one blemish—the hateful likeness to another word.—King's mother and—king's murderer.[1]—King's murderer—one that takes a king's life. King's mother—one that gives a king life.

[*She rises.*

Well, then; I will make good what I have taken.—My son shall be a king!

[*She sits down again and begins writing, but pushes the paper away again, and leans back in her chair.*

There is ever an eerie feeling in a house where lies a corpse. 'Tis therefore my mood is so strange. [*Turns her head to one side as if speaking to some one.*] Not therefore? Why else should it be?

[*Broodingly.*

Is there such a great gulf, then, between openly striking down a foe and slaying one—thus? Knut Alfson had cleft many a brow with his sword; yet was his own as peaceful as a child's. Why then do I ever see this—[*makes a motion as though striking with a knife*]—this stab in the heart—and the gush of red blood after?

[*Rings, and goes on speaking while shifting about her papers.*

[1] The words in the original are "Kongemoder" and "Kongemorder," a difference of one letter only.

Hereafter I will have nought to do with such ugly sights. I will be at work both day and night. And in a month—in a month my son will be here— —

BIÖRN.

[*Entering.*] Did you strike the bell, my lady?

LADY INGER.

[*Writing.*] Bring more lights. See to it in future that there are many lights in the room.

[BIÖRN *goes out again to the left.*

LADY INGER.

[*After a pause, rises impetuously.*] No, no, no;—I cannot guide the pen to-night! My head is burning and throbbing——

[*Startled, listens.*

What is that? Ah, they are screwing the lid on the coffin.

They told me when I was a child the story of Sir Aage,[1] who rose up and walked with his coffin on his back.—If he in there bethought him one night to come with the coffin on his back, and thank me for the loan? [*Laughs quietly.*] H'm—what have we grown people to do with childish fancies? [*Vehemently.*] Nevertheless, such stories do no good! They give uneasy dreams. When my son is king, they shall be forbidden.

[*Paces up and down once or twice; then opens the window.*

[1] Pronounce *Oaghë.*

How long is it, commonly, ere a body begins to rot? All the rooms must be aired. 'Tis not wholesome here till that be done.

[BIÖRN *comes in with two lighted branch-candlesticks, which he places on the tables.*

LADY INGER.

[*Who has set to work at the papers again.*] It is well. See you forget not what I have said. Many lights on the table!

What are they about now in there?

BIÖRN.

They are still screwing down the coffin-lid.

LADY INGER.

[*Writing.*] Are they screwing it down tight?

BIÖRN.

As tight as need be.

LADY INGER.

Ay, ay—who can tell how tight it needs to be? Do you see that 'tis well done.

[*Goes up to him with her hand full of papers, and says mysteriously:*

Biörn, you are an old man; but one counsel I will give you. Be on your guard against all men—both those that are dead and those that are still to die.—Now go in—go in and see to it that they screw the lid down tightly.

BIÖRN.

[*Softly, shaking his head.*] I cannot make her out.

[*Goes back again into the room on the left.*

LADY INGER.

[*Begins to seal a letter, but throws it down half-closed; walks up and down awhile, and then says vehemently:*] Were I a coward I had never done it—never to all eternity! Were I a coward, I had shrieked to myself: Refrain, while there is yet a shred of hope for the saving of thy soul!

[*Her eye falls on Sten Sture's picture; she turns to avoid seeing it, and says softly:*

He is laughing down at me as though he were alive! Pah!

[*Turns the picture to the wall without looking at it.*

Wherefore did you laugh? Was it because I did evil to your son? But the other,—is not he your son too? And he is mine as well; mark that!

[*Glances stealthily along the row of pictures.*

So wild as they are to-night, I have never seen them yet. Their eyes follow me wherever I may go. [*Stamps on the floor.*] I will not have it! I will have peace in my house! [*Begins to turn all the pictures to the wall.*] Ay, if it were the Holy Virgin herself—— Thinkest thou now is the time——? Why didst thou never hear my prayers, my burning prayers, that I might have my child again? Why? Be-

cause the monk of Wittenberg is right: There is no mediator between God and man!

[*She draws her breath heavily, and continues in ever-increasing distraction.*

'Tis well that I know what to think in such things. There was no one to see what was done in there. There is none to bear witness against me.

[*Suddenly stretches out her hands and whispers:*

My son! My beloved child! Come to me! Here I am!—Hush! I will tell you something: They hate me up there—beyond the stars—because I bore you into the world. 'Twas their will that I should bear the Lord God's standard over all the land. But I went my own way. That is why I have had to suffer so much and so long.

BIÖRN.

[*Comes from the room on the left.*] My lady, I have to tell you— Christ save me—what is this?

LADY INGER.

[*Has climbed up into the high-seat by the right-hand wall.*] Hush! Hush! I am the King's mother. My son has been chosen king. The struggle was hard ere it came to this—for 'twas with the Almighty One himself I had to strive.

NILS LYKKE.

[*Comes in breathless from the right.*] He is saved! I have Jens Bielke's promise. Lady Inger,—know that——

LADY INGER.

Peace, I say! look how the people swarm.

[*A funeral hymn is heard from the room within.*

There comes the coronation train. What a throng! All men bow themselves before the King's mother. Ay, ay; has she not fought for her son—even till her hands grew red withal?—Where are my daughters? I see them not.

NILS LYKKE.

God's blood!—what has befallen here?

LADY INGER.

My daughters—my fair daughters! I have none any more. I had one left, and her I lost even as she was mounting her bridal bed. [*Whispers.*] In it lay Lucia dead. There was no room for two.

NILS LYKKE.

Ah—it has come to this! The Lord's vengeance is upon me.

LADY INGER.

Can you see him? Look, look! 'Tis the King. It is Inger Gyldenlöve's son! I know him by the crown and by Sten Sture's ring that he wears round his neck. Hark, what a joyful sound! He is coming! Soon will he be in my arms! Ha-ha!—who conquers, God or I?

[*The* MEN-AT-ARMS *come out with the coffin.*

LADY INGER.

[*Clutches at her head and shrieks.*] The corpse! [*Whispers.*] Pah! 'Tis a hideous dream. [*Sinks back into the high-seat.*

JENS BIELKE.

[*Who has come in from the right, stops and cries in astonishment.*] Dead! Then after all——

ONE OF THE MEN-AT-ARMS.

'Twas he himself that——

JENS BIELKE.

[*With a look at* NILS LYKKE.] He himself——?

NILS LYKKE.

Hush!

LADY INGER.

[*Faintly, coming to herself.*] Ay, right;—now I remember all.

JENS BIELKE.

[*To the* MEN-AT-ARMS.] Set down the corpse. It is not Count Sture.

ONE OF THE MEN-AT-ARMS.

Your pardon, Captain;—this ring that he wore around his neck——

NILS LYKKE.

[*Seizes his arm.*] Be still!

LADY INGER.

[*Starts up.*] The ring? The ring!

[*Rushes up and snatches the ring from him.*

Sten Sture's ring! [*With a shriek.*] Oh God, oh God—my son!

[*Throws herself down on the coffin.*

THE MEN-AT-ARMS.

Her son?

JENS BIELKE.

[*At the same time.*] Inger Gyldenlöve's son?

NILS LYKKE.

So is it.

JENS BIELKE.

But why did you not tell me——?

BIÖRN.

[*Trying to raise her up.*] Help! help! My lady—what ails you? what lack you?

LADY INGER.

[*In a faint voice, half raising herself.*] What lack I? One coffin more. A grave beside my child— —

[*Sinks again, senseless, on the coffin.* NILS LYKKE *goes hastily out to the right. General consternation among the rest.*

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG

(1856)

THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

I WROTE *The Feast at Solhoug* in Bergen in the summer of 1855—that is to say, about twenty-eight years ago.

The play was acted for the first time on January 2, 1856, also at Bergen, as a gala performance on the anniversary of the foundation of the Norwegian Stage.

As I was then stage-manager of the Bergen Theatre, it was I myself who conducted the rehearsals of my play. It received an excellent, a remarkably sympathetic interpretation. Acted with pleasure and enthusiasm, it was received in the same spirit. The "Bergen emotionalism," which is said to have decided the result of the latest elections in those parts, ran high that evening in the crowded theatre. The performance ended with repeated calls for the author and for the actors. Later in the evening I was serenaded by the orchestra, accompanied by a great part of the audience. I almost think that I went so far as to make some kind of speech from my window; certain I am that I felt extremely happy.

A couple of months later, *The Feast at Solhoug* was played in Christiania. There also it was received by the public with much appro-

bation, and the day after the first performance Björnson wrote a friendly, youthfully ardent article on it in the *Morgenblad*. It was not a notice or criticism proper, but rather a free, fanciful improvisation on the play and the performance.

On this, however, followed the real criticism, written by the real critics.

How did a man in the Christiania of those days—by which I mean the years between 1850 and 1860, or thereabouts—become a real literary, and in particular dramatic, critic?

As a rule, the process was as follows: After some preparatory exercises in the columns of the *Samfundsblad*, and after having frequently listened to the discussions which went on in Treschow's café or at "Ingebret's" after the play, the future critic betook himself to Johan Dahl's bookshop and ordered from Copenhagen a copy of J. L. Heiberg's *Prose Works*, among which was to be found—so he had heard it said—an essay entitled *On the Vaudeville*. This essay was in due course read, ruminated on, and possibly to a certain extent understood. From Heiberg's writings the young man, moreover, learned of a controversy which that author had carried on in his day with Professor Oehlenschläger and with the Sorö poet, Hauch. And he was simultaneously made aware that J. L. Baggesen (the author of *Letters from the Dead*) had at a still earlier period made a similar attack on the great author who wrote both *Axel and Valborg* and *Hakon Jarl*.

A quantity of other information useful to a

critic was to be extracted from these writings. From them one learned, for instance, that taste obliged a good critic to be scandalised by a hiatus. Did the young critical Jeronimuses of Christiania encounter such a monstrosity in any new verse, they were as certain as their prototype in Holberg to shout their "Hoity-toity! the world will not last till Easter!"

The origin of another peculiar characteristic of the criticism then prevalent in the Norwegian capital was long a puzzle to me. Every time a new author published a book or had a little play acted, our critics were in the habit of flying into an ungovernable passion and behaving as if the publication of the book or the performance of the play were a mortal insult to themselves and the newspapers in which they wrote. As already remarked, I puzzled long over this peculiarity. At last I got to the bottom of the matter. Whilst reading the Danish *Monthly Journal of Literature* I was struck by the fact that old State-Councillor Molbech was invariably seized with a fit of rage when a young author published a book or had a play acted in Copenhagen.

Thus, or in a manner closely resembling this, had the tribunal qualified itself, which now, in the daily press, summoned *The Feast at Solhoug* to the bar of criticism in Christiania. It was principally composed of young men who, as regards criticism, lived upon loans from various quarters. Their critical thoughts had long ago been thought and expressed by others; their opinions had long ere now been formulated else-

where. Their æsthetic principles were borrowed; their critical method was borrowed; the polemical tactics they employed were borrowed in every particular, great and small. Their very frame of mind was borrowed. Borrowing, borrowing, here, there, and everywhere! The single original thing about them was that they invariably made a wrong and unseasonable application of their borrowings.

It can surprise no one that this body, the members of which, as critics, supported themselves by borrowing, should have presupposed similar action on my part, as author. Two, possibly more than two, of the newspapers promptly discovered that I had borrowed this, that, and the other thing from Henrik Hertz's play, *Svend Dyring's House*.

This is a baseless and indefensible critical assertion. It is evidently to be ascribed to the fact that the metre of the ancient ballads is employed in both plays. But my tone is quite different from Hertz's; the language of my play has a different ring; a light summer breeze plays over the rhythm of my verse; over that of Hertz's brood the storms of autumn.

Nor, as regards the characters, the action, and the contents of the plays generally, is there any other or any greater resemblance between them than that which is a natural consequence of the derivation of the subjects of both from the narrow circle of ideas in which the ancient ballads move.

It might be maintained with quite as much, or even more, reason that Hertz in his *Svend*

Dyring's House had borrowed, and that to no inconsiderable extent, from Heinrich von Kleist's *Käthchen von Heilbronn*, a play written at the beginning of this century. Käthchen's relation to Count Wetterstrahl is in all essentials the same as Ragnhild's to the knight, Stig Hvide. Like Ragnhild, Käthchen is compelled by a mysterious, inexplicable power to follow the man she loves wherever he goes, to steal secretly after him, to lay herself down to sleep near him, to come back to him, as by some innate compulsion, however often she may be driven away. And other instances of supernatural interference are to be met with both in Kleist's and in Hertz's play.

But does any one doubt that it would be possible, with a little good- or a little ill-will, to discover among still older dramatic literature a play from which it could be maintained that Kleist had borrowed here and there in his *Käthchen von Heilbronn*? I, for my part, do not doubt it. But such suggestions of indebtedness are futile. What makes a work of art the spiritual property of its creator is the fact that he has imprinted on it the stamp of his own personality. Therefore I hold that, in spite of the above-mentioned points of resemblance, *Svend Dyring's House* is as incontestably and entirely an original work by Henrik Hertz as *Käthchen von Heilbronn* is an original work by Heinrich von Kleist.

I advance the same claim on my own behalf as regards *The Feast at Solhoug*, and I trust that, for the future, each of the three

namesakes[1] will be permitted to keep, in its entirety, what rightfully belongs to him.

In writing of *The Feast at Solhoug* in connection with *Svend Dyring's House*, George Brandes expresses the opinion, not that the former play is founded upon any idea borrowed from the latter, but that it has been written under an influence exercised by the older author upon the younger. Brandes invariably criticises my work in such a friendly spirit that I have all reason to be obliged to him for this suggestion, as for so much else.

Nevertheless I must maintain that he, too, is in this instance mistaken. I have never specially admired Henrik Hertz as a dramatist. Hence it is impossible for me to believe that he should, unknown to myself, have been able to exercise any influence on my dramatic production.

As regards this point and the matter in general, I might confine myself to referring those interested to the writings of Dr. Valfrid Vasenius, lecturer on Æsthetics at the University of Helsingfors. In the thesis which gained him his degree of Doctor of Philosophy, *Henrik Ibsen's Dramatic Poetry in its First Stage* (1879), and also in *Henrik Ibsen: The Portrait of a Skald* (Jos. Seligman & Co., Stockholm, 1882), Vasenius states and supports his views on the subject of the play at present in question, supplementing them in the latter work by what I told him, very briefly, when we were together at Munich three years ago.

[1] Heinrich von Kleist, Henrik Hertz, Henrik Ibsen.

But, to prevent all misconception, I will now myself give a short account of the origin of *The Feast at Solhoug.*

I began this Preface with the statement that *The Feast at Solhoug* was written in the summer of 1855.

In 1854 I had written *Lady Inger of Östråt.* This was a task which had obliged me to devote much attention to the literature and history of Norway during the Middle Ages, especially the latter part of that period. I did my utmost to familiarise myself with the manners and customs, with the emotions, thoughts, and language, of the men of those days.

The period, however, is not one over which the student is tempted to linger, nor does it present much material suitable for dramatic treatment.

Consequently I soon deserted it for the Saga period. But the Sagas of the Kings, and in general the more strictly historical traditions of that far-off age, did not attract me greatly; at that time I was unable to put the quarrels between kings and chieftains, parties and clans, to any dramatic purpose. This was to happen later.

In the Icelandic "family" Sagas, on the other hand, I found in abundance what I required in the shape of human garb for the moods, conceptions, and thoughts which at that time occupied me, or were, at least, more or less distinctly present in my mind. With these Old-Norse contributions to the personal history of our Saga period I had had no previous acquaint-

ance; I had hardly so much as heard them named. But now N. M. Petersen's excellent translation—excellent, at least, as far as the style is concerned—fell into my hands. In the pages of these family chronicles, with their variety of scenes and of relations between man and man, between woman and woman, in short, between human being and human being, there met me a personal, eventful, really living life; and as the result of my intercourse with all these distinctly individual men and women, there presented themselves to my mind's eye the first rough, indistinct outlines of *The Vikings at Helgeland.*

How far the details of that drama then took shape, I am no longer able to say. But I remember perfectly that the two figures of which I first caught sight were the two women who in course of time became Hiördis and Dagny. There was to be a great banquet in the play, with passion-rousing, fateful quarrels during its course. Of other characters and passions, and situations produced by these, I meant to include whatever seemed to me most typical of the life which the Sagas reveal. In short, it was my intention to reproduce dramatically exactly what the Saga of the Volsungs gives in epic form.

I made no complete, connected plan at that time; but it was evident to me that such a drama was to be my first undertaking.

Various obstacles intervened. Most of them were of a personal nature, and these were probably the most decisive; but it undoubtedly had

its significance that I happened just at this time to make a careful study of Landstad's collection of Norwegian ballads, published two years previously. My mood of the moment was more in harmony with the literary romanticism of the Middle Ages than with the deeds of the Sagas, with poetical than with prose composition, with the word-melody of the ballad than with the characterisation of the Saga.

Thus it happened that the fermenting, formless design for the tragedy, *The Vikings at Helgeland*, transformed itself temporarily into the lyric drama, *The Feast at Solhoug*.

The two female characters, the foster sisters Hiördis and Dagny, of the projected tragedy, became the sisters Margit and Signë of the completed lyric drama. The derivation of the latter pair from the two women of the Saga at once becomes apparent when attention is drawn to it. The relationship is unmistakable. The tragic hero, so far only vaguely outlined, Sigurd, the far-travelled Viking, the welcome guest at the courts of kings, became the knight and minstrel, Gudmund Alfson, who has likewise been long absent in foreign lands, and has lived in the king's household. His attitude towards the two sisters was changed, to bring it into accordance with the change in time and circumstances; but the position of both sisters to him remained practically the same as that in the projected and afterwards completed tragedy. The fateful banquet, the presentation of which had seemed to me of the first importance in my original plan, became in the drama the scene

upon which its personages made their appearance; it became the background against which the action stood out, and communicated to the picture as a whole the general tone at which I aimed. The ending of the play was, undoubtedly, softened and subdued into harmony with its character as drama, not tragedy; but orthodox æstheticians may still, perhaps, find it disputable whether, in this ending, a touch of pure tragedy has not been left behind, to testify to the origin of the drama.

Upon this subject, however, I shall not enter further at present. My object has simply been to maintain and prove that the play under consideration, like all my other dramatic works, is an inevitable outcome of the tenor of my life at a certain period. It had its origin within, and was not the result of any outward impression or influence.

This, and no other, is the true account of the genesis of *The Feast at Solhoug*.

HENRIK IBSEN.

ROME, April, 1883.

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG

CHARACTERS

BENGT GAUTESON, *Master of Solhoug.*
MARGIT, *his wife.*
SIGNË, *her sister.*
GUDMUND ALFSON, *their kinsman.*
KNUT GESLING, *the King's sheriff.*
ERIK OF HEGGË, *his friend.*
A HOUSE-CARL.
ANOTHER HOUSE-CARL.
THE KING'S ENVOY.
AN OLD MAN.
A MAIDEN.
GUESTS, BOTH MEN AND LADIES.
MEN OF KNUT GESLING'S TRAIN.
SERVING-MEN AND MAIDENS AT SOLHOUG.

The action passes at Solhoug in the Fourteenth Century.

PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES: Gudmund = *Goodmoond.* The g in "Margit" and in "Gesling" is hard, as in "go," or, in "Gesling," it may be pronounced as y—"Yesling." The first o in "Solhoug" ought to have the sound of a very long "oo."

THE FEAST AT SOLHOUG

PLAY IN THREE ACTS

ACT FIRST

A stately room, with doors in the back and to both sides. In front, on the right, a bay window with small round panes, set in lead, and near the window a table, on which is a quantity of feminine ornaments. Along the left wall, a longer table with silver goblets, beakers and drinking-horns. The door in the back leads out to a passage-way,[1] *through which can be seen a spacious fiord-landscape.*

BENGT GAUTESON, MARGIT, KNUT GESLING *and* ERIK OF HEGGË *are seated around the table on the left. In the background are* KNUT'S *followers, some seated, some standing; one or two flagons of ale are handed round among them. Far off are heard church bells, ringing to Mass.*

ERIK.

[*Rising at the table.*] In one word, now, what answer have you to make to my wooing on Knut Gesling's behalf?

[1] This no doubt means a sort of arcaded veranda running along the outer wall of the house.

BENGT.

[*Glancing uneasily towards his wife.*] Well, I—to me it seems— [*As she remains silent.*] H'm, Margit, let us first hear your thought in the matter.

MARGIT.

[*Rising.*] Sir Knut Gesling, I have long known all that Erik of Heggë has told of you. I know full well that you come of a lordly house; you are rich in gold and gear, and you stand in high favour with our royal master.

BENGT.

[*To* KNUT.] In high favour—so say I too.

MARGIT.

And doubtless my sister could choose her no doughtier mate—

BENGT.

None doughtier; that is what *I* say too.

MARGIT.

—if so be that you can win her to think kindly of you.

BENGT.

[*Anxiously, and half aside.*] Nay—nay, my dear wife—

KNUT.

[*Springing up.*] Stands it so, Dame Margit! You think that your sister—

BENGT.

[*Seeking to calm him.*] Nay, nay, Knut Gesling! Have patience, now. You must understand us aright.

MARGIT.

There is naught in my words to wound you. My sister knows you only by the songs that are made about you—and these songs sound but ill in gentle ears.

No peaceful home is your father's house.
With your lawless, reckless crew,
Day out, day in, must you hold carouse—
God help her who mates with you.
God help the maiden you lure or buy
With gold and with forests green—
Soon will her sore heart long to lie
Still in the grave, I ween.

ERIK.

Aye, aye—true enough—Knut Gesling lives not overpeaceably. But there will soon come a change in that, when he gets him a wife in his hall.

KNUT.

And this I would have you mark, Dame Margit: it may be a week since, I was at a feast at Heggë, at Erik's bidding, whom here you see. The ale was strong; and as the evening wore on I vowed a vow that Signë, your fair sister, should be my wife, and that before the year was out. Never shall it be said of Knut Gesling that he brake any vow. You can see, then, that

you must e'en choose me for your sister's husband—be it with your will or against it.

MARGIT.

Ere that may be, I must tell you plain,
You must rid yourself of your ravening train.
You must scour no longer with yell and shout
O'er the country-side in a galloping rout;
You must still the shudder that spreads around
When Knut Gesling is to a bride-ale bound.
Courteous must your mien be when a-feasting you ride;
Let your battle-axe hang at home at the chimney-side—
It ever sits loose in your hand, well you know,
When the mead has gone round and your brain is aglow.
From no man his rightful gear shall you wrest,
You shall harm no harmless maiden;
You shall send to no man the shameless hest
That when his path crosses yours, he were best
Come with his grave-clothes laden.
And if you will so bear you till the year be past,
You may win my sister for your bride at last.

KNUT.

[*With suppressed rage.*] You know how to order your words cunningly, Dame Margit. Truly, you should have been a priest, and not your husband's wife.

BENGT.

Oh, for that matter, I too could—

KNUT.

[*Paying no heed to him.*] But I would have you take note that had a sword-bearing man spoken to me in such wise—

BENGT.

Nay, but listen, Knut Gesling—you must understand us!

KNUT.

[*As before.*] Well, briefly, he should have learnt that the axe sits loose in my hand, as you said but now.

BENGT.

[*Softly.*] There we have it! Margit, Margit, this will never end well.

MARGIT.

[*To* KNUT.] You asked for a forthright answer, and that I have given you.

KNUT.

Well, well; I will not reckon too closely with you, Dame Margit. You have more wit than all the rest of us together. Here is my hand;—it may be there was somewhat of reason in the keen-edged words you spoke to me.

MARGIT.

This I like well; now are you already on the right way to amendment. Yet one word more —to-day we hold a feast at Solhoug.

KNUT.

A feast?

BENGT.

Yes, Knut Gesling: you must know that it is our wedding-day; this day three years ago made me Dame Margit's husband.

MARGIT.

[*Impatiently, interrupting.*] As I said, we hold a feast to-day. When Mass is over, and your other business done, I would have you ride hither again, and join in the banquet. Then you can learn to know my sister.

KNUT.

So be it, Dame Margit; I thank you. Yet 'twas not to go to Mass that I rode hither this morning. Your kinsman, Gudmund Alfson, was the cause of my coming.

MARGIT.

[*Starts.*] He! My kinsman? Where would you seek him?

KNUT.

His homestead lies behind the headland, on the other side of the fiord.

MARGIT.

But he himself is far away.

ERIK.

Be not so sure; he may be nearer than you think.

KNUT.

[*Whispers.*] Hold your peace!

MARGIT.

Nearer? What mean you?

KNUT.

Have you not heard, then, that Gudmund Alfson has come back to Norway? He came with the Chancellor Audun of Hegranes, who was sent to France to bring home our new Queen.

MARGIT.

True enough; but in these very days the King holds his wedding-feast in full state at Bergen, and there is Gudmund Alfson a guest.

BENGT.

And there could we too have been guests had my wife so willed it.

ERIK.

[*Aside to* KNUT.] Then Dame Margit knows not that—?

KNUT.

[*Aside.*] So it would seem; but keep your counsel. [*Aloud.*] Well, well, Dame Margit, I must go my way none the less, and see what may betide. At nightfall I will be here again

MARGIT

And then you must show whether you have power to bridle your unruly spirit.

BENGT.

Aye, mark you that.

MARGIT.

You must lay no hand on your axe—hear you, Knut Gesling?

BENGT.

Neither on your axe, nor on your knife, nor on any other weapon whatsoever.

MARGIT.

For then can you never hope to be one of our kindred.

BENGT.

Nay, that is our firm resolve.

KNUT.

[*To* MARGIT.] Have no fear.

BENGT.

And what we have firmly resolved stands fast.

KNUT.

That I like well, Sir Bengt Gauteson. I, too, say the same; and I have pledged myself at the feast-board to wed your kinswoman. You may be sure that my pledge, too, will stand fast.—God's peace till to-night!

[*He and* ERIK, *with their men, go out at the back.*

[BENGT *accompanies them to the door. The sound of the bells has in the meantime ceased.*

BENGT.

[*Returning.*] Methought he seemed to threaten us as he departed.

MARGIT.

[*Absently.*] Aye, so it seemed.

BENGT.

Knut Gesling is an ill man to fall out with. And, when I bethink me, we gave him over many hard words. But come, let us not brood over that. To-day we must be merry, Margit! —as I trow we have both good reason to be.

MARGIT.

[*With a weary smile.*] Aye, surely, surely.

BENGT.

'Tis true I was no mere stripling when I courted you. But well I wot I was the richest man for many and many a mile. You were a fair maiden, and nobly born; but your dowry would have tempted no wooer.

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] Yet was I then so rich.

BENGT.

What said you, my wife?

MARGIT.

Oh, nothing, nothing. [*Crosses to the right.*] I will deck me with pearls and rings. Is not to-night a time of rejoicing for me?

BENGT.

I am fain to hear you say it. Let me see that you deck you in your best attire, that our guests may say: Happy she who mated with Bengt Gauteson.—But now must I to the larder; there are many things to-day that must not be overlooked. [*He goes out to the left.*

MARGIT.

[*Sinks down on a chair by the table on the right.*

'Twas well he departed. While here he remains
Meseems the blood freezes within my veins;
Meseems that a crushing might and cold
My heart in its clutches doth still enfold.

[*With tears she cannot repress.*

He is my husband! I am his wife!
How long, how long lasts a woman's life?
Sixty years, mayhap—God pity me
Who am not yet full twenty-three!

[*More calmly, after a short silence.*

Hard, so long in a gilded cage to pine;
Hard a hopeless prisoner's lot—and mine.

[*Absently fingering the ornaments on the table, and beginning to put them on.*

With rings, and with jewels, and all of my best
By his order myself I am decking—
But oh, if to-day were my burial-feast,
'Twere little that I'd be recking.

[*Breaking off.*

But if thus I brood I must needs despair;
I know a song that can lighten care.

[*She sings.*

The Hill-King to the sea did ride;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
To woo a maiden to be his bride.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

The Hill-King rode to Sir Håkon's hold;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
Little Kirsten sat combing her locks of gold.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

The Hill-King wedded the maiden fair;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
A silvern girdle she ever must wear.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

The Hill-King wedded the lily-wand,
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
With fifteen gold rings on either hand.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

Three summers passed, and there passed full five;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
In the hill little Kirsten was buried alive.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

Five summers passed, and there passed full nine;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
Little Kirsten ne'er saw the glad sunshine.
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

In the dale there are flowers and the birds' blithe song;
—Oh, sad are my days and dreary—
In the hill there is gold and the night is long
—I am waiting for thee, I am weary.—

[*She rises and crosses the room.*

How oft in the gloaming would Gudmund sing
This song in my father's hall.
There was somewhat in it—some strange, sad thing
That took my heart in thrall;
Though I scarce understood, I could ne'er forget—
And the words and the thoughts they haunt me yet.

[*Stops horror-struck.*

Rings of red gold! And a belt beside—!
'Twas with gold the Hill-King wedded his bride!

[*In despair; sinks down on a bench beside the table on the left.*

Woe! Woe! I myself am the Hill-King's wife!
And there cometh none to free me from the prison of my life.

[SIGNË, *radiant with gladness, comes running in from the back.*

SIGNË.

[*Calling.*] Margit, Margit,—he is coming!

MARGIT.

[*Starting up.*] Coming? Who is coming?

SIGNË.

Gudmund, our kinsman!

MARGIT.

Gudmund Alfson! Here! How can you think—?

SIGNË.

Oh, I am sure of it.

MARGIT.

[*Crosses to the right.*] Gudmund Alfson is at the wedding-feast in the King's hall; you know that as well as I.

SIGNË.

Maybe; but none the less I am sure it was he.

MARGIT.

Have you seen him?

SIGNË.

Oh, no, no; but I must tell you—

MARGIT.

Yes, haste you—tell on!

SIGNË.

'Twas early morn, and the church bells rang,
To Mass I was fain to ride;
The birds in the willows twittered and sang,
In the birch-groves far and wide.
All earth was glad in the clear, sweet day;
And from church it had well-nigh stayed me;
For still, as I rode down the shady way,
Each rosebud beguiled and delayed me.
Silently into the church I stole;

The priest at the altar was bending;
He chanted and read, and with awe in their soul,
The folk to God's word were attending.
Then a voice rang out o'er the fiord so blue;
And the carven angels, the whole church through,
Turned round, methought, to listen thereto.

MARGIT.

O Signë, say on! Tell me all, tell me all!

SIGNË.

'Twas as though a strange, irresistible call
Summoned me forth from the worshipping flock,
Over hill and dale, over mead and rock.
'Mid the silver birches I listening trod,
Moving as though in a dream;
Behind me stood empty the house of God;
Priest and people were lured by the magic,
'twould seem,
Of the tones that still through the air did stream.
No sound they made; they were quiet as death;
To hearken the song-birds held their breath,
The lark dropped earthward, the cuckoo was
still,
As the voice re-echoed from hill to hill.

MARGIT.

Go on.

SIGNË.

They crossed themselves, women and men;
[*Pressing her hands to her breast.*
But strange thoughts arose within me then;

For the heavenly song familiar grew:
Gudmund oft sang it to me and you—
Ofttimes has Gudmund carolled it,
And all he e'er sang in my heart is writ.

MARGIT.

And you think that it may be—?

SIGNË.

I know it is he!
I know it! I know it! You soon shall see!
[*Laughing.*
From far-off lands, at the last, in the end,
Each song-bird homewards his flight doth bend!
I am so happy—though why I scarce know—!
Margit, what say you? I'll quickly go
And take down his harp, that has hung so long
In there on the wall that 'tis rusted quite;
Its golden strings I will polish bright,
And tune them to ring and to sing with his song.

MARGIT.

[*Absently.*]

Do as you will—

SIGNË.

[*Reproachfully.*]

Nay, this is not right.
[*Embracing her.*
But when Gudmund comes will your heart grow light—
Light, as when I was a child, again.

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*]

So much has changed—ah, so much!—since then—

SIGNË.

Margit, you shall be happy and gay!
Have you not serving-maids many, and thralls?
Costly robes hang in rows on your chamber walls;
How rich you are, none can say.
By day you can ride in the forest deep,
Chasing the hart and the hind;
By night in a lordly bower you can sleep,
On pillows of silk reclined.

MARGIT.

[*Looking towards the window.*]

And he comes to Solhoug! He, as a guest!

SIGNË.

What say you?

MARGIT.

[*Turning.*]

Naught.—Deck you out in your best.
That fortune which seemeth to you so bright
May await yourself.

SIGNË.

Margit, say what you mean!

MARGIT.

[*Stroking her hair.*]

I mean—nay, no more! 'Twill shortly be seen—;
I mean—should a wooer ride hither to-night—?

SIGNË.

A wooer? For whom?

MARGIT.

For you.

SIGNË.

[*Laughing.*]

For me?
That he'd ta'en the wrong road full soon he would see.

MARGIT.

What would you say if a valiant knight
Begged for your hand?

SIGNË.

That my heart was too light
To think upon suitors or choose a mate.

MARGIT.

But if he were mighty, and rich, and great?

SIGNË.

Oh, were he a king, did his palace hold
Stores of rich garments and ruddy gold,

'Twould ne'er set my heart desiring.
With you I am rich enough here, meseems,
With summer and sun and the murmuring streams,
And the birds in the branches quiring.
Dear sister mine—here shall my dwelling be;
And to give any wooer my hand in fee,
For that I am too busy, and my heart too full of glee!

[SIGNË *runs out to the left, singing.*

MARGIT.

[*After a pause.*] Gudmund Alfson coming hither! Hither—to Solhoug? No, no, it cannot be.—Signë heard him singing, she said! When I have heard the pine-trees moaning in the forest afar, when I have heard the waterfall thunder and the birds pipe their lure in the tree-tops, it has many a time seemed to me as though, through it all, the sound of Gudmund's songs came blended. And yet he was far from here. —Signë has deceived herself. Gudmund cannot be coming.

[BENGT *enters hastily from the back.*

BENGT.

[*Entering, calls loudly.*] An unlooked-for guest, my wife!

MARGIT.

What guest?

BENGT.

Your kinsman, Gudmund Alfson! [*Calls through the doorway on the right.*] Let the

best guest-room be prepared—and that forthwith!

MARGIT.

Is he, then, already here?

BENGT.

[*Looking out through the passage-way.*] Nay, not yet; but he cannot be far off. [*Calls again to the right.*] The carved oak bed, with the dragon-heads! [*Advances to* MARGIT.] His shield-bearer brings a message of greeting from him; and he himself is close behind.

MARGIT.

His shield-bearer! Comes he hither with a shield-bearer?

BENGT.

Aye, by my faith he does. He has a shield-bearer and six armed men in his train. What would you? Gudmund Alfson is a far other man than he was when he set forth to seek his fortune. But I must ride forth and receive him. [*Calls out.*] The gilded saddle on my horse! And forget not the bridle with the serpents' heads! [*Looks out to the back.*] Ha, there he is already at the gate! Well, then, my staff—my silver-headed staff! Such a lordly knight—Heaven save us!—we must receive him with honour, with all seemly honour!

[*Goes hastily out to the back.*

MARGIT.

[*Brooding.*]

Alone he departed, a penniless swain;
With esquires and henchmen now comes he again.
What would he? Comes he, forsooth, to see
My bitter and gnawing misery?
Would he try how long, in my lot accurst,
I can writhe and moan, ere my heart-strings burst—
Thinks he that—? Ah, let him only try!
Full little joy shall he reap thereby.

[*She beckons through the doorway on the right. Three handmaidens enter.*

List, little maids, what I say to you:
Find me my silken mantle blue.
Go with me into my bower anon:
My richest of velvets and furs do on.
Two of you shall deck me in scarlet and vair,
The third shall wind pearl-strings into my hair.
All my jewels and gauds bear away with ye!

[*The handmaids go out to the left, taking the ornaments with them.*

Since Margit the Hill-King's bride must be,
Well! don we the queenly livery!

[*She goes out to the left.*

[BENGT *ushers in* GUDMUND ALFSON, *through the pent-house passage at the back.*

BENGT.

And now once more—welcome under Solhoug's roof, my wife's kinsman.

GUDMUND.

I thank you. And how goes it with her? She thrives well in every way, I make no doubt?

BENGT.

Aye, you may be sure she does. There is nothing she lacks. She has five handmaidens, no less, at her beck and call; a courser stands ready saddled in the stall when she lists to ride abroad. In one word, she has all that a noble lady can desire to make her happy in her lot.

GUDMUND.

And Margit—is she then happy?

BENGT.

God and all men would think that she must be; but, strange to say—

GUDMUND.

What mean you?

BENGT.

Well, believe it or not as you list, but it seems to me that Margit was merrier of heart in the days of her poverty, than since she became the lady of Solhoug.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*] I knew it; so it must be.

BENGT.

What say you, kinsman?

GUDMUND.

I say that I wonder greatly at what you tell me of your wife.

BENGT.

Aye, you may be sure I wonder at it too. On the faith and troth of an honest gentleman, 'tis beyond me to guess what more she can desire. I am about her all day long; and no one can say of me that I rule her harshly. All the cares of household and husbandry I have taken on myself; yet notwithstanding— Well, well, you were ever a merry heart; I doubt not you will bring sunshine with you. Hush! here comes Dame Margit! Let her not see that I—

[MARGIT *enters from the left, richly dressed.*

GUDMUND.

[*Going to meet her.*] Margit—my dear Margit!

MARGIT.

[*Stops, and looks at him without recognition.*] Your pardon, Sir Knight; but—? [*As though she only now recognised him.*] Surely, if I mistake not, 'tis Gudmund Alfson.

[*Holding out her hand to him.*

GUDMUND.

[*Without taking it.*] And you did not at once know me again?

BENGT.

[*Laughing.*] Why, Margit, of what are you thinking? I told you but a moment agone that your kinsman—

MARGIT.

[*Crossing to the table on the right.*] Twelve years is a long time, Gudmund. The freshest plant may wither ten times over in that space.

GUDMUND.

'Tis seven years since last we met.

MARGIT.

Surely it must be more than that.

GUDMUND.

[*Looking at her.*] I could almost think so. But 'tis as I say.

MARGIT.

How strange! I must have been but a child then; and it seems to me a whole eternity since I was a child. [*Throws herself down on a chair.*] Well, sit you down, my kinsman! Rest you, for to-night you shall dance, and rejoice us with your singing. [*With a forced smile.*] Doubtless you know we are merry here to-day—we are holding a feast.

GUDMUND.

'Twas told me as I entered your homestead.

BENGT.

Aye, 'tis three years to-day since I became—

MARGIT.

[*Interrupting.*] My kinsman has already heard it. [*To* GUDMUND.] Will you not lay aside your cloak?

GUDMUND.

I thank you, Dame Margit; but it seems to me cold here—colder than I had foreseen.

BENGT.

For my part, I am warm enough; but then I have a hundred things to do and to take order for. [*To* MARGIT.] Let not the time seem long to our guest while I am absent. You can talk together of the old days. [*Going.*

MARGIT.

[*Hesitating.*] Are you going? Will you not rather—?

BENGT.

[*Laughing, to* GUDMUND, *as he comes forward again.*] See you well—Sir Bengt of Solhoug is the man to make the women fain of him. How short so e'er the space, my wife cannot abide to be without me. [*To* MARGIT, *caressing her.*] Content you; I shall soon be with you again. [*He goes out to the back.*

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] Oh, torture, to have to endure it all. [*A short silence.*

GUDMUND.

How goes it, I pray, with your sister dear?

MARGIT.

Right well, I thank you.

GUDMUND.

They said she was here With you.

MARGIT.

She has been here ever since we— [*Breaks off.*

She came, now three years since, to Solhoug with me. [*After a pause.*

Ere long she'll be here, her friend to greet.

GUDMUND.

Well I mind me of Signë's nature sweet.
No guile she dreamed of, no evil knew.
When I call to remembrance her eyes so blue
I must think of the angels in heaven.
But of years there have passed no fewer than seven;
In that time much may have altered. Oh, say
If she, too, has changed so while I've been away?

MARGIT.

She too? Is it, pray, in the halls of kings
That you learn such courtly ways, Sir Knight?
To remind me thus of the change time brings—

GUDMUND.

Nay, Margit, my meaning you read aright!
You were kind to me, both, in those far-away
years—
Your eyes, when we parted were wet with tears.
We swore like brother and sister still
To hold together in good hap or ill.
'Mid the other maids like a sun you shone,
Far, far and wide was your beauty known.
You are no less fair than you were, I wot;
But Solhoug's mistress, I see, has forgot
The penniless kinsman. So hard is your mind
That ever of old was gentle and kind.

MARGIT.

[*Choking back her tears.*]

Aye, of old—!

GUDMUND.

[*Looks compassionately at her, is silent for a little, then says in a subdued voice.*

Shall we do as your husband said?
Pass the time with talk of the dear old days?

MARGIT.

[*Vehemently.*]

No, no, not of them! [*More calmly.*
Their memory's dead.
My mind unwillingly backward strays.
Tell rather of what your life has been,
Of what in the wide world you've done and seen.
Adventures you've lacked not, well I ween—

In all the warmth and the space out yonder,
That heart and mind should be light, what wonder?

GUDMUND.

In the King's high hall I found not the joy
That I knew by my own poor hearth as a boy.

MARGIT.

[*Without looking at him.*]

While I, as at Solhoug each day flits past,
Thank Heaven that here has my lot been cast.

GUDMUND.

'Tis well if for this you can thankful be—

MARGIT.

[*Vehemently.*]

Why not? For am I not honoured and free?
Must not all folk here obey my hest?
Rule I not all things as seemeth me best?
Here I am first, with no second beside me;
And that, as you know, from of old satisfied me.
Did you think you would find me weary and sad?
Nay, my mind is at peace and my heart is glad.
You might, then, have spared your journey here
To Solhoug; 'twill profit you little, I fear.

GUDMUND.

What, mean you, Dame Margit?

MARGIT.
[*Rising.*]
I understand all—
I know why you come to my lonely hall.

GUDMUND.
And you welcome me not, though you know why
I came? [*Bowing, and about to go.*
God's peace and farewell, then, my noble dame!

MARGIT.
To have stayed in the royal hall, indeed,
Sir Knight, had better become your fame.

GUDMUND.
[*Stops.*]
In the royal hall? Do you scoff at my need?

MARGIT.
Your need? You are ill to content, my friend;
Where, I would know, do you think to end?
You can dress you in velvet and cramoisie,
You stand by the throne, and have lands in fee—

GUDMUND.
Do you deem, then, that fortune is kind to me?
You said but now that full well you knew
What brought me to Solhoug—

MARGIT.
I told you true!

GUDMUND.
Then you know what of late has befallen me;—
You have heard the tale of my outlawry?

MARGIT.

[*Terror-struck.*]

An outlaw! You, Gudmund!

GUDMUND.

I am indeed.
But I swear, by the Holy Christ I swear,
Had I known the thoughts of your heart, I ne'er
Had bent me to Solhoug in my need.
I thought that you still were gentle-hearted,
As you ever were wont to be ere we parted:
But I truckle not to you; the wood is wide,
My hand and my bow shall fend for me there;
I will drink of the mountain brook, and hide
My head in the wild beast's lair.

[*On the point of going.*

MARGIT.

[*Holding him back.*]

Outlawed! Nay, stay! I swear to you
That naught of your outlawry I knew.

GUDMUND.

It is as I tell you. My life's at stake;
And to live are all men fain.
Three nights like a dog 'neath the sky I've lain,
My couch on the hillside forced to make,
With for pillow the boulder grey.
Though too proud to knock at the door of the stranger,
And pray him for aid in the hour of danger,
Yet strong was my hope as I held on my way:

I thought: When to Solhoug you come at last
Then all your pains will be done and past.
You have sure friends there, whatever betide.—
But hope like a wayside flower shrivels up;
Though your husband met me with flagon and cup,
And his doors flung open wide,
Within, your dwelling seems chill and bare;
Dark is the hall; my friends are not there.
'Tis well; I will back to my hills from your halls.

MARGIT.

[*Beseechingly.*]

Oh, hear me!

GUDMUND.

My soul is not base as a thrall's.
Now life to me seems a thing of nought;
Truly I hold it scarce worth a thought.
You have killed all that I hold most dear;
Of my fairest hopes I follow the bier.
Farewell, then, Dame Margit!

MARGIT.

Nay, Gudmund, hear!
By all that is holy—!

GUDMUND.

Live on as before
Live on in honour and joyance—
Never shall Gudmund darken your door,
Never shall cause you 'noyance.

MARGIT.

Enough, enough. Your bitterness
You presently shall rue.
Had I known you outlawed, shelterless,
Hunted the country through—
Trust me, the day that brought you here
Would have seemed the fairest of many a year;
And a feast I had counted it indeed
When you turned to Solhoug for refuge in need.

GUDMUND.

What say you—? How shall I read your mind?

MARGIT.

[*Holding out her hand to him.*]
Read this: that at Solhoug dwell kinsfolk kind.

GUDMUND.

But you said of late—?

MARGIT.

To that pay no heed.
Or hear me, and understand indeed.
For me is life but a long, black night,
Nor sun, nor star for me shines bright.
I have sold my youth and my liberty,
And none from my bargain can set me free.
My heart's content I have bartered for gold,
With gilded chains I have fettered myself;
Trust me, it is but comfort cold
To the sorrowful soul, the pride of pelf.
How blithe was my childhood—how free from care!

Our house was lowly and scant our store;
But treasures of hope in my breast I bore.

GUDMUND.

[*Whose eyes have been fixed upon her.*]

E'en then you were growing to beauty rare.

MARGIT.

Mayhap; but the praises showered on me
Caused the wreck of my happiness—that I now see.
To far-off lands away you sailed;
But deep in my heart was graven each song
You had ever sung; and their glamour was strong;
With a mist of dreams my brow they veiled.
In them all the joys you had dwelt upon
That can find a home in the beating breast;
You had sung so oft of the lordly life
'Mid knights and ladies. And lo! anon
Came wooers a many from east and from west;
And so—I became Bengt Gauteson's wife.

GUDMUND.

Oh, Margit!

MARGIT.

The days that passed were but few
Ere with tears my folly I 'gan to rue.
To think, my kinsman and friend, on thee
Was all the comfort left to me.
How empty now seemed Solhoug's hall,
How hateful and drear its great rooms all!

Hither came many a knight and dame,
Came many a skald to sing my fame.
But never a one who could fathom aright
My spirit and all its yearning—
I shivered, as though in the Hill-King's might;
Yet my head throbbed, my blood was burning.

GUDMUND.

But your husband—?

MARGIT.

He never to me was dear.
'Twas his gold was my undoing.
When he spoke to me, aye, or e'en drew near,
My spirit writhed with ruing.
[*Clasping her hands.*
And thus have I lived for three long years—
A life of sorrow, of unstanched tears!
Your coming was rumoured. You know full well
What pride deep down in my heart doth dwell.
I hid my anguish, I veiled my woe,
For you were the last that the truth must know.

GUDMUND.

[*Moved.*]

'Twas therefore, then, that you turned away—

MARGIT.

[*Not looking at him.*]

I thought you came at my woe to jeer.

GUDMUND.

Margit, how could you think—?

MARGIT.

Nay, nay,
There was reason enough for such a fear.
But thanks be to Heaven, that fear is gone;
And now no longer I stand alone;
My spirit now is as light and free
As a child's at play 'neath the greenwood tree.
[*With a sudden start of fear.*
Ah, where are my wits fled! How could I forget—?
Ye saints, I need sorely your succor yet!
An outlaw, you said—?

GUDMUND.

[*Smiling.*]
Nay, now I'm at home;
Hither the King's men scarce dare come.

MARGIT.

Your fall has been sudden. I pray you, tell
How you lost the King's favour.

GUDMUND.

'Twas thus it befell.
You know how I journeyed to France of late,
When the Chancellor, Audun of Hegranes,
Fared thither from Bergen, in royal state,
To lead home the King's bride, the fair Princess,
With her squires, and maidens, and ducats bright.
Sir Audun's a fair and a stately knight,
The Princess shone with a beauty rare—
Her eyes seemed full of a burning prayer.

They would oft talk alone and in whispers, the two—
Of what? That nobody guessed or knew.
There came a night when I leant at ease
Against the galley's railing;
My thoughts flew onward to Norway's leas,
With the milk-white seagulls sailing.
Two voices whispered behind my back;—
I turned—it was he and she;
I knew them well, though the night was black,
But they—they saw not me.
She gazed upon him with sorrowful eyes
And whispered: "Ah, if to southern skies
We could turn the vessel's prow,
And we were alone in the bark, we twain,
My heart, methinks, would find peace again,
Nor would fever burn my brow."
Sir Audun answers; and straight she replies,
In words so fierce, so bold;
Like glittering stars I can see her eyes;
She begged him— [*Breaking off.*
My blood ran cold.

MARGIT.

She begged—?

GUDMUND.

I arose, and they vanished apace;
All was silent, fore and aft;—
[*Producing a small phial.*
But this I found by their resting place.

MARGIT.

And that—?

GUDMUND.

[*Lowering his voice.*]

Holds a secret draught.
A drop of this in your enemy's cup
And his life will sicken and wither up.
No leechcraft helps 'gainst the deadly thing.

MARGIT.

And that—?

GUDMUND.

That draught was meant for the King.

MARGIT.

Great God!

GUDMUND.

[*Putting up the phial again.*]

That I found it was well for them all.
In three days more was our voyage ended;
Then I fled, by my faithful men attended.
For I knew right well, in the royal hall,
That Audun subtly would work my fall,—
Accusing me—

MARGIT.

Aye, but at Solhoug he
Cannot harm you. All as of old will be.

GUDMUND.

All? Nay, Margit—you then were free.

MARGIT.

You mean—?

GUDMUND.

I? Nay, I meant naught. My brain
Is wildered; but ah, I am blithe and fain
To be, as of old, with you sisters twain.
But tell me,—Signë—?

MARGIT.

[*Points smiling towards the door on the left.*]
She comes anon.
To greet her kinsman she needs must don
Her trinkets—a task that takes time, 'tis plain.

GUDMUND.

I must see—I must see if she knows me again.
[*He goes out to the left.*

MARGIT.

[*Following him with her eyes.*] How fair and manlike he is! [*With a sigh.*] There is little likeness 'twixt him and— [*Begins putting things in order on the table, but presently stops.*] "You then were free," he said. Yes, then! [*A short pause.*] 'Twas a strange tale, that of the Princess who— She held another dear, and then— Aye, those women of far-off lands— I have heard it before—they are not weak as we are; they do not fear to pass from thought to deed. [*Takes up a goblet which stands on the table.*] 'Twas in this beaker that Gudman and I, when he went away, drank to his happy return. 'Tis well-nigh the only heirloom I brought with me to Solhoug. [*Putting the goblet away in a cupboard.*] How soft is

this summer day; and how light it is in here! So sweetly has the sun not shone for three long years.

[SIGNË, *and after her* GUDMUND, *enters from the left.*

SIGNË.

[*Runs laughing up to* MARGIT.]

Ha, ha, ha! He will not believe that 'tis I!

MARGIT.

[*Smiling, to* GUDMUND.]

You see: while in far-off lands you strayed,
She, too, has altered, the little maid.

GUDMUND.

Aye truly! But that she should be— Why,
'Tis a marvel in very deed.

[*Takes both* SIGNË'S *hands and looks at her.*

Yet, when I look in these eyes so blue,
The innocent child-mind I still can read—
Yes, Signë, I know that 'tis you!
I needs must laugh when I think how oft
I have thought of you perched on my shoulder aloft
As you used to ride. You were then a child;
Now you are a nixie, spell-weaving, wild.

SIGNË.

[*Threatening with her finger.*]

Beware! If the nixie's ire you awaken,
Soon in her nets you will find yourself taken.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*]

I am snared already, it seems to me.

SIGNË.

But, Gudmund, wait—you have still to see
How I've shielded your harp from the dust and the rust.

[*As she goes out to the left.*

You shall teach me all of your songs! You must!

GUDMUND.

[*Softly, as he follows her with his eyes.*]

She has flushed to the loveliest rose of May,
That was yet but a bud in the morning's ray.

SIGNË.

[*Returning with the harp.*]

Behold!

GUDMUND.

[*Taking it.*]

My harp! As bright as of yore!

[*Striking one or two chords.*

Still the old chords ring sweet and clear—
On the wall, untouched, thou shalt hang no more.

MARGIT.

[*Looking out at the back.*]

Our guests are coming.

SIGNË.

[*While* GUDMUND *preludes his song.*]

Hush—hush! Oh, hear!

GUDMUND.

[*Sings.*]

I roamed through the uplands so heavy of cheer;
The little birds quavered in bush and in brere;
The little birds quavered, around and above:
Wouldst know of the sowing and growing of love?

It grows like the oak tree through slow-rolling years;
'Tis nourished by dreams, and by songs, and by tears;
But swiftly 'tis sown; ere a moment speeds by,
Deep, deep in the heart love is rooted for aye.

[*As he strikes the concluding chords, he goes towards the back, where he lays down his harp.*

SIGNË.

[*Thoughtfully, repeats to herself.*]

But swiftly 'tis sown; ere a moment speeds by,
Deep, deep in the heart love is rooted for aye.

MARGIT.

[*Absently.*] Did you speak to me?—I heard not clearly—?

SIGNË.

I? No, no. I only meant—

[*She again becomes absorbed in dreams.*

MARGIT.

[*Half aloud; looking straight before her.*]

It grows like the oak tree through slow-rolling years;
'Tis nourished by dreams, and by songs and by tears.

SIGNË.

[*Returning to herself.*] You said that—?

MARGIT.

[*Drawing her hand over her brow.*] Nay, 'twas nothing. Come, we must go meet our guests.

[BENGT *enters with many* GUESTS, *both men and women, through the passage-way.*

GUESTS.

[*Sing.*]

With song and harping enter we
The feast-hall opened wide;
Peace to our hostess kind and free,
All happiness to her betide.
O'er Solhoug's roof for ever may
Bright as to-day
The heavens abide.

ACT SECOND

A birch grove adjoining the house, one corner of which is seen to the left. At the back, a footpath leads up the hillside. To the right of the footpath a river comes tumbling down a ravine and loses itself among boulders and stones. It is a light summer evening. The door leading to the house stands open; the windows are lighted up. Music is heard from within.

THE GUESTS.

[*Singing in the Feast Hall.*]

Set bow to fiddle! To sound of strings
We'll dance till night shall furl her wings,
Through the long hours glad and golden!
Like blood-red blossom the maiden glows—
Come, bold young wooer and hold the rose
In a soft embrace enfolden.

[KNUT GESLING *and* ERIK OF HEGGË *enter from the house. Sounds of music, dancing and merriment are heard from within during what follows.*

ERIK.

If only you come not to repent it, Knut.

KNUT.

That is my affair.

ERIK.

Well, say what you will, 'tis a daring move. You are the King's Sheriff. Commands go forth to you that you shall seize the person of Gudmund Alfson, wherever you may find him. And now, when you have him in your grasp, you proffer him your friendship, and let him go freely, whithersoever he will.

KNUT.

I know what I am doing. I sought him in his own dwelling, but there he was not to be found. If, now, I went about to seize him here—think you that Dame Margit would be minded to give me Signë to wife?

ERIK.

[*With deliberation.*] No, by fair means it might scarcely be, but—

KNUT.

And by foul means I am loth to proceed. Moreover, Gudmund is my friend from bygone days; and he can be helpful to me. [*With decision.*] Therefore it shall be as I have said. This evening no one at Solhoug shall know that Gudmund Alfson is an outlaw;—to-morrow he must look to himself.

ERIK.

Aye, but the King's decree?

KNUT.

Oh, the King's decree! You know as well as I that the King's decree is but little heeded here in the uplands. Were the King's decree to be enforced, many a stout fellow among us would have to pay dear both for bride-rape and for man-slaying. Come this way, I would fain know where Signë—?

[*They go out to the right.*

[GUDMUND *and* SIGNË *come down the foot-path at the back.*

SIGNË.

Oh, speak! Say on! For sweeter far
Such words than sweetest music are.

GUDMUND.

Signë, my flower, my lily fair!

SIGNË.

[*In subdued, but happy wonderment.*]
I am dear to him—I!

GUDMUND.

As none other I swear.

SIGNË.

And is it I that can bind your will!
And is it I that your heart can fill!
Oh, dare I believe you?

GUDMUND.

Indeed you may.
List to me, Signë! The years sped away,
But faithful was I in my thoughts to you,
My fairest flowers, ye sisters two.
My own heart I could not clearly read.
When I left, my Signë was but a child,
A fairy elf, like the creatures wild
Who play, while we sleep, in wood and mead.
But in Solhoug's hall to-day, right loud
My heart spake, and right clearly;
It told me that Margit's a lady proud,
Whilst you're the sweet maiden I love most dearly.

SIGNË.

[*Who has only half listened to his words.*]

I mind me, we sat in the hearth's red glow,
One winter evening—'tis long ago—
And you sang to me of the maiden fair
Whom the neckan had lured to his watery lair.
There she forgot both father and mother,
There she forgot both sister and brother;
Heaven and earth and her Christian speech,
And her God, she forgot them all and each.
But close by the strand a stripling stood
And he was heartsore and heavy of mood.
He struck from his harpstrings notes of woe,
That wide o'er the waters rang loud, rang low.
The spell-bound maid in the tarn so deep,
His strains awoke from her heavy sleep.
The neckan must grant her release from his rule,
She rose through the lilies afloat on the pool—

Then looked she to heaven while on green earth she trod,
And wakened once more to her faith and her God.

GUDMUND.

Signë, my fairest of flowers!

SIGNË.

It seems
That I, too, have lived in a world of dreams.
But the strange deep words you to-night have spoken,
Of the power of love, have my slumber broken.
The heavens seemed never so blue to me,
Never the world so fair;
I can understand, as I roam with thee,
The song of the birds in air.

GUDMUND.

So mighty is love—it stirs in the breast
Thoughts and longings and happy unrest.
But come, let us both to your sister go.

SIGNË.

Would you tell her—?

GUDMUND.

Everything she must know.

SIGNË.

Then go you alone;—I feel that my cheek
Would be hot with blushes to hear you speak.

GUDMUND.

So be it, I go.

SIGNË.

And here will I bide;
[*Listening towards the right.*
Or better—down by the riverside,
I hear Knut Gesling, with maidens and men.

GUDMUND.

There will you stay?

SIGNË.

Till you come again.

[*She goes out to the right.* GUDMUND *goes into the house.*

[MARGIT *enters from behind the house on the left.*

MARGIT.

In the hall there is gladness and revelry;
The dancers foot it with jest and glee.
The air weighed hot on my brow and breast;
For Gudmund, he was not there.
[*She draws a deep breath.*
Out here 'tis better: here's quiet and rest.
How sweet is the cool night air!
[*A brooding silence.*
That horrible thought! Oh, why should it be
That wherever I go it follows me?

The phial—doth a secret draught contain;
A drop of this in my—enemy's cup,
And his life would sicken and wither up;
The leech's skill would be tried in vain.

[*Again a silence.*

Were I sure that Gudmund—held me dear—
Then little I'd care for—

[GUDMUND *enters from the house.*

GUDMUND.

You, Margit, here?
And alone? I have sought you everywhere.

MARGIT.

'Tis cool here. I sickened of heat and glare.
See you how yonder the white mists glide
Softly over the marshes wide?
Here it is neither dark nor light,
But midway between them—

[*To herself.*

—as in my breast.

[*Looking at him.*

Is't not so—when you wander on such a night
You hear, though but half to yourself confessed,
A stirring of secret life through the hush,
In tree and in leaf, in flower and in rush?

[*With a sudden change of tone.*

Can you guess what I wish?

GUDMUND.

Well?

MARGIT.

That I could be
The nixie that haunts yonder upland lea.
How cunningly I should weave my spell!
Trust me—!

GUDMUND.

Margit, what ails you? Tell!

MARGIT.

[*Paying no heed to him.*]

How I should quaver my magic lay!
Quaver and croon it both night and day!

[*With growing vehemence.*

How I would lure the knight so bold
Through the greenwood glades to my mountain hold.
There were the world and its woes forgot
In the burning joys of our blissful lot.

GUDMUND.

Margit! Margit!

MARGIT.

[*Ever more wildly.*]

At midnight's hour
Sweet were our sleep in my lonely bower;—
And if death should come with the dawn, I trow
'Twere sweet to die so;—what thinkest thou?

GUDMUND.

You are sick!

MARGIT.

[*Bursting into laughter.*]

Ha, ha!—Let me laugh! 'Tis good
To laugh when the heart is in laughing mood!

GUDMUND.

I see that you still have the same wild soul
As of old—

MARGIT.

[*With sudden seriousness.*]

Nay, let not that vex your mind,
'Tis only at midnight it mocks control;
By day I am timid as any hind.
How tame I have grown, you yourself must say,
When you think on the women in lands far away—
Of that fair Princess—ah, she was wild!
Beside her lamblike am I and mild.
She did not helplessly yearn and brood,
She would have acted; and that—

GUDMUND.

'Tis good
You remind me; straightway I'll cast away
What to me is valueless after this day—

[*Takes out the phial.*

MARGIT.

The phial! You meant—?

GUDMUND.

I thought it might be
At need a friend that should set me free
Should the King's men chance to lay hands on me.
But from to-night it has lost its worth;
Now will I fight all the kings of earth,
Gather my kinsfolk and friends to the strife,
And battle right stoutly for freedom and life.

[*Is about to throw the phial against a rock.*

MARGIT.

[*Seizing his arm.*]

Nay, hold! Let me have it—

GUDMUND.

First tell me why?

MARGIT.

I'd fain fling it down to the neckan hard by,
Who so often has made my dull hours fleet
With his harping and songs, so strange and sweet.
Give it me! [*Takes the phial from his hand.*
There!

[*Feigns to throw it into the river.*

GUDMUND.

[*Goes to the right, and looks down into the ravine.*]

Have you thrown it away?

MARGIT.

[*Concealing the phial.*]

Aye, surely! You saw—

[*Whispers as she goes towards the house.*

Now God help and spare me!
The ice must now either break or bear me!

[*Aloud.*

Gudmund!

GUDMUND.

[*Approaching.*]

What would you?

MARGIT.

Teach me, I pray,
How to interpret the ancient lay
They sing of the church in the valley there:
A gentle knight and a lady fair,
They loved each other well.
That very day on her bier she lay
He on his sword-point fell.
They buried her by the northward spire,
And him by the south kirk wall;
And theretofore grew neither bush nor briar
In the hallowed ground at all.
But next spring from their coffins twain
Two lilies fair upgrew—
And by and by, o'er the roof-tree high,
They twined and they bloomed the whole year through.
How read you the riddle?

GUDMUND.

[*Looks searchingly at her.*]

I scarce can say.

MARGIT.

You may doubtless read it in many a way;
But its truest meaning, methinks, is clear:
The church can never sever two that hold each other dear.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*]

Ye saints, if she should—? Lest worse befall,
'Tis time indeed I told her all! [*Aloud.*
Do you wish for my happiness—Margit, tell!

MARGIT.

[*In joyful agitation.*]

Wish for it! I!

GUDMUND.

Then, wot you well,
The joy of my life now rests with you—

MARGIT.

[*With an outburst.*]

Gudmund!

GUDMUND.

Listen! 'tis time you knew—

[*He stops suddenly.*

[*Voices and laughter are heard by the river bank.* SIGNË *and some other* GIRLS *en-*

ter from the right, accompanied by KNUT, ERIK *and several* YOUNGER MEN.

KNUT.

[*Still at a distance.*] Gudmund Alfson! Wait; I must speak a word with you.

[*He stops, talking to* ERIK. *The other* GUESTS *in the meantime enter the house.*

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] The joy of his life—! What else can he mean but—! [*Half aloud.*] Signë —my dëar, dear sister!

[*She puts her arm round* SIGNË'*s waist, and they go towards the back talking to each other.*

GUDMUND.

[*Softly, as he follows them with his eyes.*] Aye, so it were wisest. Both Signë and I must away from Solhoug. Knut Gesling has shown himself my friend; he will help me.

KNUT.

[*Softly, to* ERIK.] Yes, yes, I say, Gudmund is her kinsman; he can best plead my cause.

ERIK.

Well, as you will. [*He goes into the house.*

KNUT.

[*Approaching.*] Listen, Gudmund—

GUDMUND.

[*Smiling.*] Come you to tell me that you dare no longer let me go free.

KNUT.

Dare! Be at your ease as to that. Knut Gesling dares whatever he will. No, 'tis another matter. You know that here in the district, I am held to be a wild, unruly companion—

GUDMUND.

Aye, and if rumour lies not—

KNUT.

Why no, much that it reports may be true enough. But now, I must tell you—

[*They go, conversing, up towards the back.*

SIGNË.

[*To* MARGIT, *as they come forward beside the house.*] I understand you not. You speak as though an unlooked-for happiness had befallen you. What is in your mind?

MARGIT.

Signë—you are still a child; you know not what it means to have ever in your heart the dread of— [*Suddenly breaking off.*] Think, Signë, what it must be to wither and die without ever having lived.

SIGNË.

[*Looks at her in astonishment, and shakes her head.*] Nay, but, Margit—?

MARGIT.

Aye, aye, you do not understand, but none the less—

[*They go up again, talking to each other.* GUDMUND *and* KNUT *come down on the other side.*

GUDMUND.

Well, if so it be—if this wild life no longer contents you—then I will give you the best counsel that ever friend gave to friend: take to wife an honourable maiden.

KNUT.

Say you so? And if I now told you that 'tis even that I have in mind?

GUDMUND.

Good luck and happiness to you then, Knut Gesling! And now you must know that I too—

KNUT.

You? Are you, too, so purposed?

GUDMUND.

Aye, truly. But the King's wrath—I am a banished man—

KNUT.

Nay, to that you need give but little thought. As yet there is no one here, save Dame Margit, that knows aught of the matter; and so long as I am your friend, you have one in whom you can trust securely. Now I must tell you—

[*He proceeds in a whisper as they go up again.*

SIGNË.

[*As she and* MARGIT *again advance.*] But tell me then, Margit—!

MARGIT.

More I dare not tell you.

SIGNË.

Then will I be more open-hearted than you. But first answer me one question. [*Bashfully, with hesitation.*] Is there—is there no one who has told you anything concerning me?

MARGIT.

Concerning you? Nay, what should that be?

SIGNË.

[*As before, looking downwards.*] You said to me this morning: if a wooer came riding hither—?

MARGIT.

That is true. [*To herself.*] Knut Gesling—has he already—? [*Eagerly, to* SIGNË.] Well? What then?

SIGNË.

[*Softly, but with exultation.*] The wooer has come! He has come, Margit! I knew not then whom you meant; but now—!

MARGIT.

And what have you answered him?

SIGNË.

Oh, how should I know? [*Flinging her arms round her sister's neck.*] But the world seems to me so rich and beautiful since the moment when he told me that he held me dear.

MARGIT.

Why, Signë, Signë, I cannot understand that you should so quickly—! You scarce knew him before to-day.

SIGNË.

Oh, 'tis but little I yet know of love; but this I know that what the song says is true:
Full swiftly 'tis sown; ere a moment speeds by,
Deep, deep in the heart love is rooted for aye—

MARGIT.

So be it; and since so it is, I need no longer hold aught concealed from you. Ah—

[*She stops suddenly, as she sees* KNUT *and* GUDMUND *approaching.*

KNUT.

[*In a tone of satisfaction.*] Ha, this is as I would have it, Gudmund. Here is my hand!

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] What is this?

GUDMUND.

[*To* KNUT.] And here is mine!

[*They shake hands.*

KNUT.

But now we must each of us name who it is—

GUDMUND.

Good. Here at Solhoug, among so many fair women, I have found her whom—

KNUT.

I too. And I will bear her home this very night, if it be needful.

MARGIT.

[*Who has approached unobserved.*] All saints in heaven!

GUDMUND.

[*Nods to* KNUT.] The same is my intent!

SIGNË.

[*Who has also been listening.*] Gudmund!

GUDMUND AND KNUT.

[*Whispering to each other, as they both point at* SIGNË.] There she is!

GUDMUND.

[*Starting.*] Aye, mine.

KNUT.

[*Likewise.*] No, mine!

MARGIT.

[*Softly, half bewildered.*] Signë!

GUDMUND.

[*As before, to* KNUT.] What mean you by that?

KNUT.

I mean that 'tis Signë whom I—

GUDMUND.

Signë! Signë is my betrothed in the sight of God.

MARGIT.

[*With a cry.*] It was she! No—no!

GUDMUND.

[*To himself, as he catches sight of her.*] Margit! She has heard everything.

KNUT.

Ho, ho! So this is how it stands? Nay, Dame Margit, 'tis needless to put on such an air of wonder; now I understand everything.

MARGIT.

[*To* SIGNË.] But not a moment ago you said—? [*Suddenly grasping the situation.*] 'Twas Gudmund you meant!

SIGNË.

[*Astonished.*] Yes, did you not know it! But what ails you, Margit?

MARGIT.

[*In an almost toneless voice.*] Nay, nothing, nothing.

KNUT.

[*To* MARGIT.] And this morning, when you made me give my word that I would stir no strife here to-night—you already knew that Gudmund Alfson was coming. Ha, ha, think not that you can hoodwink Knut Gesling! Signë has become dear to me. Even this morning 'twas but my hasty vow that drove me to seek her hand; but now—

SIGNË.

[*To* MARGIT.] He? Was this the wooer that was in your mind?

MARGIT.

Hush, hush!

KNUT.

[*Firmly and harshly.*] Dame Margit—you are her elder sister; you shall give me an answer.

MARGIT.

[*Battling with herself.*] Signë has already made her choice;—I have naught to answer.

KNUT.

Good; then I have nothing more to do at Solhoug. But after midnight—mark you this—the day is at an end; then you may chance to see me again, and then Fortune must decide whether it be Gudmund or I that shall bear Signë away from this house.

GUDMUND.

Aye, try if you dare; it shall cost you a bloody sconce.

SIGNË.

[*In terror.*] Gudmund! By all the saints—!

KNUT.

Gently, gently, Gudmund Alfson! Ere sunrise you shall be in my power. And she—your lady-love— [*Goes up to the door, beckons and calls in a low voice.*] Erik! Erik! come hither! we must away to our kinsfolk. [*Threateningly, while* ERIK *shows himself in the doorway.*] Woe upon you all when I come again!

[*He and* ERIK *go off to the left at the back.*]

SIGNË.

[*Softly to* GUDMUND.] Oh, tell me, what does all this mean?

GUDMUND.

[*Whispering.*] We must both leave Solhoug this very night.

SIGNË.

God shield me—you would—!

GUDMUND.

Say nought of it! No word to any one, not even to your sister.

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] She—it is she! She of whom he had scarce thought before to-night. Had I been free, I know well whom he had chosen.—Aye, free!

[BENGT *and* GUESTS, *both Men and Women, enter from the house.*

YOUNG MEN AND MAIDENS.

Out here, out here be the feast arrayed,
While the birds are asleep in the greenwood shade.
How sweet to sport in the flowery glade
'Neath the birches.

Out here, out here, shall be mirth and jest,
No sigh on the lips and no care in the breast,
When the fiddle is tuned at the dancers' 'hest,
'Neath the birches.

BENGT.

That is well, that is well! So I fain would see it! I am merry, and my wife likewise; and therefore I pray ye all to be merry along with us.

ONE OF THE GUESTS.

Aye, now let us have a stave-match.[1]

MANY.

[*Shout.*] Yes, yes, a stave-match!

ANOTHER GUEST.

Nay, let that be; it leads but to strife at the feast. [*Lowering his voice.*] Bear in mind that Knut Gesling is with us to-night.

SEVERAL.

[*Whispering among themselves.*] Aye, aye, that is true. Remember the last time, how he—. Best beware.

AN OLD MAN.

But you, Dame Margit—I know your kin had ever wealth of tales in store; and you yourself, even as a child, knew many a fair legend.

MARGIT.

Alas! I have forgot them all. But ask Gudmund Alfson, my kinsman; he knows a tale that is merry enough.

[1] A contest in impromptu verse-making.

GUDMUND.

[*In a low voice, imploringly.*] Margit!

MARGIT.

Why, what a pitiful countenance you put on! Be merry, Gudmund! Be merry! Aye, aye, it comes easy to you, well I wot. [*Laughing, to the* GUESTS.] He has seen the huldra to-night. She would fain have tempted him; but Gudmund is a faithful swain. [*Turns again to* GUDMUND.] Aye, but the tale is not finished yet. When you bear away your lady-love, over hill and through forest, be sure you turn not round; be sure you never look back—the huldra sits laughing behind every bush; and when all is done— [*In a low voice, coming close up to him*] —you will go no further than she will let you. [*She crosses to the right.*]

SIGNË.

Oh, God! Oh, God!

BENGT.

[*Going around among the* GUESTS *in high contentment.*] Ha, ha, ha! Dame Margit knows how to set the mirth afoot! When she takes it in hand, she does it much better than I.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*] She threatens! I must tear the last hope out of her breast; else will peace never come to her mind. [*Turns to the* GUESTS.]

I mind me of a little song. If it please you to hear it—

SEVERAL OF THE GUESTS.

Thanks, thanks, Gudmund Alfson!

[*They close around him, some sitting, others standing.* MARGIT *leans against a tree in front on the right.* SIGNË *stands on the left, near the house.*

GUDMUND.

[*Sings.*]

I rode into the wildwood,
I sailed across the sea,
But 'twas at home I wooed and won
A maiden fair and free.

It was the Queen of Elfland,
She waxed full wroth and grim:
Never, she swore, shall that maiden fair
Ride to the church with him.

Hear me, thou Queen of Elfland.
Vain, vain are threat and spell;
For naught can sunder two true hearts
That love each other well!

AN OLD MAN.

That is a right fair song. See how the young swains cast their glances thitherward! [*Pointing towards the* GIRLS.] Aye, aye, doubtless each has his own.

BENGT.

[*Making eyes at* MARGIT.] Yes, I have mine, that is sure enough. Ha, ha, ha!

MARGIT.

[*To herself, quivering.*] To have to suffer all this shame and scorn! No, no; now to essay the last remedy!

BENGT.

What ails you? Meseems you look so pale.

MARGIT.

'Twill soon pass over. [*Turns to the* GUESTS.] Did I say e'en now that I had forgotten all my tales? I bethink me now that I remember one.

BENGT.

Good, good, my wife! Come, let us hear it.

YOUNG GIRLS.

[*Urgently.*] Yes, tell it us, tell it us, Dame Margit!

MARGIT.

I almost fear that 'twill little please you; but that must be as it may.

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*] Saints in heaven, surely she would not—!

MARGIT.

It was a fair and noble maid,
She dwelt in her father's hall;
Both linen and silk did she broider and braid,
Yet found in it solace small.
For she sat there alone in cheerless state,
Empty were hall and bower;
In the pride of her heart, she was fain to mate
With a chieftain of pelf and power.
But now 'twas the Hill King, he rode from the north,
With his henchmen and his gold;
On the third day at night he in triumph fared forth,
Bearing her to his mountain hold.
Full many a summer she dwelt in the hill;
Out of beakers of gold she could drink at her will.
Oh, fair are the flowers of the valley, I trow,
But only in dreams can she gather them now!
'Twas a youth, right gentle and bold to boot,
Struck his harp with such magic might
That it rang to the mountain's inmost root,
Where she languished in the night.
The sound in her soul waked a wondrous mood—
Wide open the mountain-gates seemed to stand;
The peace of God lay over the land,
And she saw how it all was fair and good.
There had happened what never had happened before;
She had wakened to life as his harp-strings thrilled;
And her eyes were opened to all the store
Of treasure wherewith the good earth is filled.

For mark this well: it hath ever been found
That those who in caverns deep lie bound
Are lightly freed by the harp's glad sound.
He saw her prisoned, he heard her wail—
But he cast unheeding his harp aside,
Hoisted straightway his silken sail,
And sped away o'er the waters wide
To stranger strands with his new-found bride.

[*With ever-increasing passion.*

So fair was thy touch on the golden strings
That my breast heaves high and my spirit sings!
I must out, I must out to the sweet green leas!
I die in the Hill-King's fastnesses!
He mocks at my woe as he clasps his bride
And sails away o'er the waters wide!

[*Shrieks.*

With me all is over; my hill-prison barred;
Unsunned is the day, and the night all unstarred.

[*She totters and, fainting, seeks to support herself against the trunk of a tree.*

SIGNË.

[*Weeping, has rushed up to her, and takes her in her arms.*] Margit! My sister!

GUDMUND.

[*At the same time, supporting her.*] Help! Help! she is dying!

[BENGT *and the* GUESTS *flock round them with cries of alarm.*

ACT THIRD

The hall at Solhoug as before, but now in disorder after the feast. It is night still, but with a glimmer of approaching dawn in the room and over the landscape without.

BENGT *stands outside in the passage-way, with a beaker of ale in his hand. A party of* GUESTS *are in the act of leaving the house. In the room a* MAID-SERVANT *is restoring order.*

BENGT.

[*Calls to the departing* GUESTS.] God speed you, then, and bring you back ere long to Solhoug. Methinks you, like the rest, might have stayed and slept till morning. Well, well! Yet hold—I'll e'en go with you to the gate. I must drink your healths once more. [*He goes out.*

GUESTS.

[*Sing in the distance.*]

Farewell, and God's blessing on one and all
Beneath this roof abiding!
The road must be faced. To the fiddler we call:
Tune up! Our cares deriding,
With dance and with song
We'll shorten the way so weary and long.
Right merrily off we go.

[*The song dies away in the distance.*

[MARGIT *enters the hall by the door on the right.*

MAID.

God save us, my lady, have you left your bed?

MARGIT.

I am well. Go you and sleep. Stay—tell me, are the guests all gone?

MAID.

No, not all; some wait till later in the day; ere now they are sleeping sound.

MARGIT.

And Gudmund Alfson—?

MAID.

He, too, is doubtless asleep. [*Points to the right.*] 'Tis some time since he went to his chamber—yonder, across the passage.

MARGIT.

Good; you may go.

[*The* MAID *goes out to the left.*

[MARGIT *walks slowly across the hall, seats herself by the table on the right, and gazes out at the open window.*

MARGIT.

To-morrow, then, Gudmund will ride away
Out into the world so great and wide.
Alone with my husband here I must stay;
And well do I know what will then betide.
Like the broken branch and the trampled flower
I shall suffer and fade from hour to hour.

[*Short pause; she leans back in her chair.*

I once heard a tale of a child blind from birth,
Whose childhood was full of joy and mirth;
For the mother, with spells of magic might,
Wove for the dark eyes a world of light.
And the child looked forth with wonder and glee
Upon valley and hill, upon land and sea.
Then suddenly the witchcraft failed—
The child once more was in darkness pent;
Good-bye to games and merriment;
With longing vain the red cheeks paled.
And its wail of woe, as it pined away,
Was ceaseless, and sadder than words can say.—
Oh! like that child's my eyes were sealed,
To the light and the life of summer blind—

[*She springs up.*

But now—! And I in this cage confined!
No, now is the worth of my youth revealed!
Three years of life I on him have spent—
My husband—but were I longer content
This hapless, hopeless weird to dree,
Meek as a dove I needs must be.
I am wearied to death of petty brawls;
The stirring life of the great world calls.
I will follow Gudmund with shield and bow,
I will share his joys, I will soothe his woe,
Watch o'er him both by night and day.
All that behold shall envy the life
Of the valiant knight and Margit his wife.—
His wife! [*Wrings her hands.*
Oh God, what is this I say!
Forgive me, forgive me, and oh! let me feel
The peace that hath power both to soothe and to heal.

[*Walks back and forward, brooding silently.*

Signë, my sister—? How hateful 'twere
To steal her glad young life from her!
But who can tell? In very sooth
She may love him but with the light love of youth.

[*Again silence; she takes out the little phial, looks long at it and says under her breath:*

This phial—were I its powers to try—
My husband would sleep for ever and aye!

[*Horror-struck.*

No, no! To the river's depths with it straight!

[*In the act of throwing it out of the window, stops.*

And yet I could—'tis not yet too late.—

[*With an expression of mingled horror and rapture, whispers.*

With what a magic resistless might
Sin masters us in our own despite!
Doubly alluring methinks is the goal
I must reach through blood, with the wreck of my soul.

[BENGT, *with the empty beaker in his hand, comes in from the passage-way; his face is red; he staggers slightly.*

BENGT.

[*Flinging the beaker upon the table on the left.*] My faith, this has been a feast that will be the talk of the country. [*Sees* MARGIT.]

Eh, are you there? You are well again. Good, good.

MARGIT.

[*Who in the meantime has concealed the phial.*] Is the door barred?

BENGT.

[*Seating himself at the table on the left.*] I have seen to everything. I went with the last guests as far as the gates. But what became of Knut Gesling to-night?—Give me mead, Margit! I am thirsty. Fill this cup.

[MARGIT *fetches a flagon of mead from a cupboard, and fills the goblet which is on the table in front of him.*

MARGIT.

[*Crossing to the right with the flagon.*] You asked about Knut Gesling.

BENGT.

That I did. The boaster, the braggart! I have not forgot his threats of yester-morning.

MARGIT.

He used worse words when he left to-night.

BENGT.

He did? So much the better. I will strike him dead.

MARGIT.

[*Smiling contemptuously.*] H'm—

BENGT.

I will kill him, I say! I fear not to face ten such fellows as he. In the store-house hangs my grandfather's axe; its shaft is inlaid with silver; with that axe in my hands, I tell you—! [*Thumps the table and drinks.*] To-morrow I shall arm myself, go forth with all my men, and slay Knut Gesling. [*Empties the beaker.*

MARGIT.

[*To herself.*] Oh, to have to live with him!

[*Is in the act of leaving the room.*

BENGT.

Margit, come here! Fill my cup again. [*She approaches; he tries to draw her down on to his knee.*] Ha, ha, ha! You are right fair, Margit! I love you well!

MARGIT.

[*Freeing herself.*] Let me go!

[*Crosses, with the goblet in her hand, to the left.*

BENGT.

You are not in the humour to-night. Ha, ha, ha! That means no great matter, I know.

MARGIT.

[*Softly, as she fills the goblet.*] Oh, that this might be the last beaker I should fill for you.

[*She leaves the goblet on the table and is making her way out to the left.*

BENGT.

Hark to me, Margit. For one thing you may thank Heaven, and that is, that I made you my wife before Gudmund Alfson came back.

MARGIT.

[*Stops at the door.*] Why so?

BENGT.

Why, say you? Am not I ten times the richer man? And certain I am that he would have sought you for his wife, had you not been the mistress of Solhoug.

MARGIT.

[*Drawing nearer and glancing at the goblet.*] Say you so?

BENGT.

I could take my oath upon it. Bengt Gauteson has two sharp eyes in his head. But he may still have Signë.

MARGIT.

And you think he will—?

BENGT.

Take her? Aye, since he cannot have you. But had you been free,—then— Ha, ha, ha! Gudmund is like the rest. He envies me my wife. That is why I set such store by you, Margit. Here with the goblet again. And let it be full to the brim!

MARGIT.

[*Goes unwillingly across to the right.*] You shall have it straightway.

BENGT.

Knut Gesling is a suitor for Signë, too, but him I am resolved to slay. Gudmund is an honourable man; he shall have her. Think, Margit, what good days we shall have with them for neighbours. We will go a-visiting each other, and then will we sit the live-long day, each with his wife on his knee, drinking and talking of this and of that.

MARGIT.

[*Whose mental struggle is visibly becoming more severe, involuntarily takes out the phial as she says:*] No doubt, no doubt!

BENGT.

Ha, ha, ha! it may be that at first Gudmund will look askance at me when I take you in my arms; but that, I doubt not, he will soon get over.

MARGIT.

This is more than woman can bear! [*Pours the contents of the phial into the goblet, goes to the window and throws out the phial, then says, without looking at him.*] Your beaker is full.

BENGT.

Then bring it hither!

MARGIT.

[*Battling in an agony of indecision, at last says.*] I pray you drink no more to-night!

BENGT.

[*Leans back in his chair and laughs.*] Oho! You are impatient for my coming? Get you in; I will follow you soon.

MARGIT.

[*Suddenly decided.*] Your beaker is full. [*Points.*] There it is.

[*She goes quickly out to the left.*

BENGT.

[*Rising.*] I like her well. It repents me not a whit that I took her to wife, though of heritage she owned no more than yonder goblet and the brooches of her wedding gown.

[*He goes to the table at the window and takes the goblet.*

[*A* HOUSE-CARL *enters hurriedly and with scared looks, from the back.*

HOUSE-CARL.

[*Calls.*] Sir Bengt, Sir Bengt! haste forth with all the speed you can! Knut Gesling with an armed train is drawing near the house.

BENGT.

[*Putting down the goblet.*] Knut Gesling? Who brings the tidings?

HOUSE-CARL.

Some of your guests espied him on the road beneath, and hastened back to warn you.

BENGT.

E'en so. Then will I—! Fetch me my grandfather's battle-axe!

[*He and the* HOUSE-CARL *go out at the back.*

[*Soon after,* GUDMUND *and* SIGNË *enter quietly and cautiously by the door on the right.*

SIGNË.

[*In muffled tones.*]

It must, then. be so!

GUDMUND.

[*Also softly.*]

Necessity's might
Constrains us.

SIGNË.

Oh! thus under cover of night
To steal from the valley where I was born!

[*Dries her eyes.*

Yet shalt thou hear no plaint forlorn.
'Tis for thy sake my home I flee;
Wert thou not outlawed, Gudmund dear,
I'd stay with my sister.

GUDMUND.

Only to be
Ta'en by Knut Gesling, with bow and spear,
Swung on the croup of his battle-horse,
And made his wife by force.

SIGNË.

Quick, let us flee. But whither go?

GUDMUND.

Down by the fiord a friend I know;
He'll find us a ship. O'er the salt sea foam
We'll sail away south to Denmark's bowers.
There waits you there a happy home;
Right joyously will fleet the hours;
The fairest of flowers they bloom in the shade
Of the beech-tree glade.

SIGNË.

[*Bursts into tears.*]

Farewell, my poor sister! Like mother tender
Thou hast guarded the ways my feet have trod,
Hast guided my footsteps, aye praying to God,
The Almighty, to be my defender.—
Gudmund—here is a goblet filled with mead;
Let us drink to her; let us wish that ere long
Her soul may again be calm and strong,
And that God may be good to her need.

[*She takes the goblet into her hands.*

GUDMUND.

Aye, let us drain it, naming her name!

[*Starts.*

Stop! [*Takes the goblet from her.*

For meseems it is the same—

SIGNË.

'Tis Margit's beaker.

GUDMUND.

[*Examining it carefully.*]

By Heaven, 'tis so!
I mind me still of the red wine's glow
As she drank from it on the day we parted
To our meeting again in health and glad-hearted.
To herself that draught betided woe.
No, Signë, ne'er drink wine or mead
From that goblet.

[*Pours its contents out at the window.*

We must away with all speed.

[*Tumult and calls without, at the back.*

SIGNË.

List, Gudmund! Voices and trampling feet!

GUDMUND.

Knut Gesling's voice!

SIGNË.

O save us, Lord!

GUDMUND.

[*Places himself in front of her.*]

Nay, nay, fear nothing, Signë sweet—
I am here, and my good sword.

[MARGIT *comes in in haste from the left.*

MARGIT.

[*Listening to the noise.*] What means this? Is my husband—?

GUDMUND AND SIGNË.

Margit!

MARGIT.

[*Catches sight of them.*] Gudmund! And Signë! Are you here?

SIGNË.

[*Going towards her.*] Margit—dear sister!

MARGIT.

[*Appalled, having seen the goblet which* GUDMUND *still holds in his hand.*] The goblet! Who has drunk from it?

GUDMUND.

[*Confused.*] Drunk—? I and Signë—we meant—

MARGIT.

[*Screams.*] O God, have mercy! Help! Help! They will die!

GUDMUND.

[*Setting down the goblet.*] Margit—!

SIGNË.

What ails you, sister?

MARGIT.

[*Towards the back.*] Help, help! Will no one help?

[*A* HOUSE-CARL *rushes in from the passage-way.*

HOUSE-CARL.

[*Calls in a terrified voice.*] Lady Margit! Your husband—!

MARGIT.

He—has he, too, drunk—!

GUDMUND.

[*To himself.*] Ah! now I understand—

HOUSE-CARL.

Knut Gesling has slain him.

SIGNË.

Slain!

GUDMUND.

[*Drawing his sword.*] Not yet, I hope. [*Whispers to* MARGIT.] Fear not. No one has drunk from your goblet.

MARGIT.

Then thanks be to God, who has saved us all!

[*She sinks down on a chair to the left.* GUDMUND *hastens towards the door at the back.*

ANOTHER HOUSE-CARL.

[*Enters, stopping him.*] You come too late. Sir Bengt is dead.

GUDMUND.

Too late, then, too late.

HOUSE-CARL.

The guests and your men have prevailed against the murderous crew. Knut Gesling and his men are prisoners. Here they come.

[GUDMUND'S *men, and a number of* GUESTS *and* HOUSE-CARLS, *lead in* KNUT GESLING, ERIK OF HEGGË, *and several of* KNUT'S *men, bound.*

KNUT.

[*Who is pale, says in a low voice.*] Manslayer, Gudmund. What say you to that?

GUDMUND.

Knut, Knut, what have you done?

ERIK.

'Twas a mischance, of that I can take my oath.

KNUT.

He ran at me swinging his axe; I meant but to defend myself, and struck the death-blow unawares.

ERIK.

Many here saw all that befell.

KNUT.

Lady Margit, crave what fine you will. I am ready to pay it.

MARGIT.

I crave naught. God will judge us all. Yet stay—one thing I require. Forgo your evil design upon my sister.

KNUT.

Never again shall I essay to redeem my baleful pledge. From this day onward I am a better man. Yet would I fain escape dishonourable punishment for my deed. [*To* GUDMUND.] Should you be restored to favour and place again, say a good word for me to the King!

GUDMUND.

I? Ere the sun sets, I must have left the country.

[*Astonishment amongst the* GUESTS. ERIK *in whispers, explains the situation.*

MARGIT.

[*To* GUDMUND.] You go? And Signë with you?

SIGNË.

[*Beseechingly.*] Margit!

MARGIT.

Good fortune follow you both!

SIGNË.

[*Flinging her arms round* MARGIT'S *neck.*] Dear sister!

GUDMUND.

Margit, I thank you. And now farewell. [*Listening.*] Hush! I hear the tramp of hoofs in the court-yard.

SIGNË.

[*Apprehensively.*] Strangers have arrived.

[*A* HOUSE-CARL *appears in the doorway at the back.*

HOUSE-CARL.

The King's men are without. They seek Gudmund Alfson.

SIGNË.

Oh God!

MARGIT.

[*In great alarm.*] The King's men!

GUDMUND.

All is at an end, then. Oh Signë, to lose you now—could there be a harder fate?

KNUT.

Nay, Gudmund; sell your life dearly, man! Unbind us; we are ready to fight for you, one and all.

ERIK.

[*Looks out.*] 'Twould be in vain; they are too many for us.

SIGNË.

Here they come. Oh Gudmund, Gudmund!

[*The* KING'S MESSENGER *enters from the back, with his escort.*

MESSENGER.

In the King's name I seek you, Gudmund Alfson, and bring you his behests.

GUDMUND.

Be it so. Yet am I guiltless; I swear it by all that is holy!

MESSENGER.

We know it.

GUDMUND.

What say you?

[*Agitation amongst those present.*

MESSENGER.

I am ordered to bid you as a guest to the King's house. His friendship is yours as it was before, and along with it he bestows on you rich fiefs.

GUDMUND.

Signë!

SIGNË.

Gudmund!

GUDMUND.

But tell me—?

MESSENGER.

Your enemy, the Chancellor Audun Hugleikson, has fallen.

GUDMUND.

The Chancellor!

GUESTS.

[*To each other, in a half-whisper.*] Fallen!

MESSENGER.

Three days ago he was beheaded at Bergen. [*Lowering his voice.*] His offence was against Norway's Queen.

MARGIT.

[*Placing herself between* GUDMUND *and* SIGNË.]
Thus punishment treads on the heels of crime!
Protecting angels, loving and bright,
Have looked down in mercy on me to-night,
And come to my rescue while yet it was time.
Now know I that life's most precious treasure
Is nor worldly wealth nor earthly pleasure,
I have felt the remorse, the terror I know,
Of those who wantonly peril their soul,
To St. Sunniva's cloister forthwith I go.—
[*Before* GUDMUND *and* SIGNË *can speak.*
Nay: think not to move me or control.

[*Places* SIGNË'S *hand in* GUDMUND'S.

Take her then, Gudmund, and make her your bride.
Your union is holy; God's on your side.

[*Waving farewell, she goes towards the doorway on the left.* GUDMUND *and* SIGNË *follow her, she stops them with a motion of her hand, goes out, and shuts the door behind her. At this moment the sun rises and sheds its light into the hall.*

GUDMUND.

Signë—my wife! See, the morning glow!
'Tis the morning of our young love. Rejoice!

SIGNË.

All my fairest of dreams and of memories I owe
To the strains of thy harp and the sound of thy voice.
My noble minstrel, to joy or sadness
Tune thou that harp as seems thee best;
There are chords, believe me, within my breast
To answer to thine, or of woe or of gladness.

CHORUS OF MEN AND WOMEN.

Over earth keeps watch the eye of light,
Guardeth lovingly the good man's ways,
Sheddeth round him its consoling rays;—
Praise be to the Lord in heaven's height!

LOVE'S COMEDY

PERSONS OF THE COMEDY

MRS. HALM, *widow of a government official.*
SVANHILD, ANNA, } *her daughters.*
FALK, *a young author,* LIND, *a divinity student,* } *her boarders.*
GULDSTAD, *a wholesale merchant.*
STIVER, *a law-clerk.*
MISS JAY, *his fiancée.*
STRAWMAN, *a country clergyman.*
MRS. STRAWMAN, *his wife.*
STUDENTS, GUESTS, MARRIED AND PLIGHTED PAIRS.
THE STRAWMANS' EIGHT LITTLE GIRLS.
FOUR AUNTS, A PORTER, DOMESTIC SERVANTS.

SCENE.—*Mrs. Halm's Villa on the Drammensvejen at Christiania.*

LOVE'S COMEDY

PLAY IN THREE ACTS

ACT FIRST

The SCENE *represents a pretty garden irregularly but tastefully laid out; in the background are seen the fjord and the islands. To the left is the house, with a verandah and an open dormer window above; to the right in the foreground an open summer-house with a table and benches. The landscape lies in bright afternoon sunshine. It is early summer; the fruit-trees are in flower.*

When the Curtain rises, MRS. HALM, ANNA, *and* MISS JAY *are sitting on the verandah, the first two engaged in embroidery, the last with a book. In the summer-house are seen* FALK, LIND, GULDSTAD, *and* STIVER: *a punch-bowl and glasses are on the table.* SVANHILD *sits alone in the background by the water.*

FALK [*rises, lifts his glass, and sings*].

Sun-glad day in garden shady
Was but made for thy delight:
What though promises of May-day
Be annulled by Autumn's blight?

Apple-blossom white and splendid
Drapes thee in its glowing tent,—
Let it, then, when day is ended,
Strew the closes storm-besprent.

CHORUS OF GENTLEMEN.

Let it, then, when day is ended, etc.

FALK.

Wherefore seek the harvest's guerdon
While the tree is yet in bloom?
Wherefore drudge beneath the burden
Of an unaccomplished doom?
Wherefore let the scarecrow clatter
Day and night upon the tree?
Brothers mine, the sparrows' chatter
Has a cheerier melody.

CHORUS.

Brothers mine, the sparrow's chatter, etc

FALK.

Happy songster! Wherefore scare him
From our blossom-laden bower?
Rather for his music spare him
All our future, flower by flower;
Trust me, 'twill be cheaply buying
Present song with future fruit;
List the proverb, "Time is flying;—"
Soon our garden music's mute.

CHORUS.

List the proverb, etc.

FALK.

I will live in song and gladness,—
Then, when every bloom is shed,
Sweep together, scarce in sadness,
All that glory, wan and dead:
Fling the gates wide! Bruise and batter,
Tear and trample, hoof and tusk;
I have plucked the flower, what matter
Who devours the withered husk!

CHORUS.

I have plucked the flower, etc.
[*They clink and empty their glasses.*

FALK [*to the ladies*].

There—that's the song you asked me for; but pray
Be lenient to it—I can't think to-day.

GULDSTAD.

Oh, never mind the sense—the sound's the thing.

MISS JAY [*looking round*].

But Svanhild, who was eagerest to hear—?
When Falk began, she suddenly took wing
And vanished—

ANNA [*pointing towards the back*].

No, for there she sits—I see her.

MRS. HALM [*sighing*].

That child! Heaven knows, she's past my comprehending!

MISS JAY.

But, Mr. Falk, I thought the lyric's ending
Was not so rich in—well, in poetry,
As others of the stanzas seemed to be.

STIVER.

Why yes, and I am sure it could not tax
Your powers to get a little more inserted—

FALK [*clinking glasses with him*].

You cram it in, like putty into cracks,
Till lean is into streaky fat converted.

STIVER [*unruffled*].

Yes, nothing easier—I, too, in my day
Could do the trick.

GULDSTAD.

Dear me! Were you a poet?

MISS JAY.

My Stiver! Yes!

STIVER.

Oh, in a humble way.

MISS JAY [*to the ladies*].

His nature is romantic.

MRS. HALM.

Yes, we know it.

STIVER.

Not now; it's ages since I turned a rhyme.

FALK.

Yes, varnish and romance go off with time.
But in the old days—?

STIVER.

Well, you see, 'twas when
I was in love.

FALK.

Is that time over, then?
Have you slept off the sweet intoxication?

STIVER.

I'm now engaged—I hold official station—
That's better than in love, I apprehend!

FALK.

Quite so! You're in the right, my good old friend.
The worst is past—*vous voilà bien avancé*—
Promoted from mere lover to *fiancé*.

STIVER [*with a smile of complacent recollection*].

It's strange to think of it—upon my word,
I half suspect my memory of lying—
[*Turns to* FALK.
But seven years ago—it sounds absurd!—
I wasted office hours in versifying.

FALK.

What! Office hours—!

STIVER.

Yes, such were my transgressions.

GULDSTAD [*ringing on his glass*].

Silence for our solicitor's confessions!

STIVER.

But chiefly after five, when I was free,
I'd rattle off whole reams of poetry—
Ten—fifteen folios ere I went to bed—

FALK.

I see—you gave your Pegasus his head,
And off he tore—

STIVER.

On stamped or unstamped paper—
'Twas all the same to him—he'd prance and caper—

FALK.

The spring of poetry flowed no less flush?
But how, pray, did you teach it first to gush?

STIVER.

By aid of love's divining-rod, my friend!
Miss Jay it was that taught me where to bore,
My *fiancée*—she became so in the end—
For then she was—

FALK.

Your love and nothing more.

STIVER [*continuing*].

'Twas a strange time; I could not read a bit;
I tuned my pen instead of pointing it;
And when along the foolscap sheet it raced,
It twangled music to the words I traced;—
At last by letter I declared my flame
To her—to her—

FALK.

Whose *fiancé* you became.

STIVER.

In course of post her answer came to hand—
The motion granted—judgment in my favour!

FALK.

And you felt bigger, as you wrote, and braver,
To find you'd brought your venture safe to land!

STIVER.

Of course.

FALK.

And then you bade the Muse farewell?

STIVER.

I've felt no lyric impulse, truth to tell,
From that day forth. My vein appeared to peter
Entirely out; and now, if I essay
To turn a verse or two for New Year's Day,
I make the veriest hash of rhyme and metre,
And—I've no notion what the cause can be—
It turns to law and not to poetry.

GULDSTAD [*clinks glasses with him*].

And, trust me, you're no whit the worse for that! [*To* FALK.
You think the stream of life is flowing solely
To bear you to the goal you're aiming at—
But you may find yourself mistaken wholly.
As for your song, perhaps it's most poetic,
Perhaps it's not—on that point we won't quarrel—
But here I lodge a protest energetic,
Say what you will, against its wretched moral.
A masterly economy and new
To let the birds play havoc at their pleasure
Among your fruit-trees, fruitless now for you,
And suffer flocks and herds to trample through
Your garden, and lay waste its springtide treasure!
A pretty prospect, truly, for next year!

FALK.

Oh, next, next, next! The thought I loathe and fear
That these four letters timidly express—
It beggars millionaires in happiness!

If I could be the autocrat of speech
But for one hour, that hateful word I'd banish;
I'd send it packing out of mortal reach,
As B and G from Knudsen's Grammar vanish.

STIVER.

Why should the word of hope enrage you thus?

FALK.

Because it darkens God's fair earth for us.
"Next year," "next love," "next life,"—my soul is vext
To see this world in thraldom to "the next."
'Tis this dull forethought, bent on future prizes,
That millionaires in gladness pauperises.
Far as the eye can reach, it blurs the age;
All rapture of the moment it destroys;
No one dares taste in peace life's simplest joys
Until he's struggled on another stage—
And there arriving, can he there repose?
No—to a new "next" off he flies again;
On, on, unresting, to the grave he goes;
And God knows if there's any resting then.

MISS JAY.

Fie, Mr. Falk, such sentiments are shocking.

ANNA [*pensively*].

Oh, I can understand the feeling quite;
I am sure at bottom Mr. Falk is right.

MISS JAY [*perturbed*].

My Stiver mustn't listen to his mocking.
He's rather too eccentric even now.—
My dear, I want you.

STIVER [*occupied in cleaning his pipe*].

Presently, my dear.

GULDSTAD [*to* FALK].

One thing at least to me is very clear;—
And that is that you cannot but allow
Some forethought indispensable. For see,
Suppose that you to-day should write a sonnet,
And, scorning forethought, you should lavish on it
Your last reserve, your all, of poetry,
So that, to-morrow, when you set about
Your next song, you should find yourself cleaned out,
Heavens! how your friends the critics then would crow!

FALK.

D'you think they'd notice I was bankrupt? No!
Once beggared of ideas, I and they
Would saunter arm in arm the selfsame way— [*Breaking off.*
But Lind! why, what's the matter with you, pray?
You sit there dumb and dreaming—I suspect you're
Deep in the mysteries of architecture.

LIND [*collecting himself*].

I? What should make you think so?

FALK.

I observe.
Your eyes are glued to the verandah yonder—
You're studying, mayhap, its arches' curve,
Or can it be its pillars' strength you ponder,
The door perhaps, with hammered iron hinges?
The window blinds, and their artistic fringes?
From something there your glances never wander.

LIND.

No, you are wrong—I'm just absorbed in being—
Drunk with the hour—naught craving, naught foreseeing.
I feel as though I stood, my life complete,
With all earth's riches scattered at my feet.
Thanks for your song of happiness and spring—
From out my inmost heart it seemed to spring.
[*Lifts his glass and exchanges a glance, unobserved, with* ANNA.
Here's to the blossom in its fragrant pride!
What reck we of the fruit of autumn-tide?
[*Empties his glass.*

FALK [*looks at him with surprise and emotion, but assumes a light tone*].

Behold, fair ladies! though you scorn me quite,
Here I have made an easy proselyte.
His hymn-book yesterday was all he cared for—
To-day e'en dithyrambics he's prepared for!

We poets must be born, cries every judge;
But prose-folks, now and then, like Strasburg geese,
Gorge themselves so inhumanly obese
On rhyming balderdash and rhythmic fudge,
That, when cleaned out, their very souls are thick
With lyric lard and greasy rhetoric.
[*To* LIND.
Your praise, however, I shall not forget;
We'll sweep the lyre henceforward in duet.

MISS JAY.

You, Mr. Falk, are hard at work, no doubt,
Here in these rural solitudes delightful,
Where at your own sweet will you roam about—

MRS. HALM [*smiling*].

Oh, no, his laziness is something frightful.

MISS JAY.

What! here at Mrs. Halm's! that's most surprising—
Surely it's just the place for poetising—
[*Pointing to the right.*
That summer-house, for instance, in the wood
Sequestered, name me any place that could
Be more conducive to poetic mood—

FALK.

Let blindness veil the sunlight from mine eyes,
I'll chant the splendour of the sunlit skies!

Just for a season let me beg or borrow
A great, a crushing, a stupendous sorrow,
And soon you'll hear my hymns of gladness rise!
But best, Miss Jay, to nerve my wings for flight,
Find me a maid to be my life, my light—
For that incitement long to Heaven I've pleaded;
But hitherto, worse luck, it hasn't heeded.

MISS JAY.

What levity!

MRS. HALM.

Yes, most irreverent!

FALK.

Pray don't imagine it was my intent
To live with her on bread and cheese and kisses.
No! just upon the threshold of our blisses,
Kind Heaven must snatch away the gift it lent.
I need a little spiritual gymnastic;
The dose in that form surely would be drastic.

SVANHILD

[*Has during the talk approached; she stands close to the table, and says in a determined but whimsical tone:*

I'll pray that such may be your destiny.
But, when it finds you—bear it like a man.

FALK [*turning round in surprise*].

Miss Svanhild!—well, I'll do the best I can.
But think you I may trust implicitly
To finding your petitions efficacious?
Heaven, as you know, to faith alone is gracious—
And though you've doubtless will enough for two
To make me bid my peace of mind adieu,
Have you the faith to carry matters through?
That is the question.

SVANHILD [*half in jest*].

Wait till sorrow comes,
And all your being's springtide chills and numbs,
Wait till it gnaws and rends you, soon and late,
Then tell me if my faith is adequate.

[*She goes across to the ladies.*

MRS. HALM [*aside to her*].

Can you two never be at peace? you've made
Poor Mr. Falk quite angry, I'm afraid.

[*Continues reprovingly in a low voice.* MISS JAY *joins in the conversation.* SVANHILD *remains cold and silent.*

FALK [*after a pause of reflection goes over to the summer-house, then to himself*].

With fullest confidence her glances lightened.
Shall I believe, as she does so securely,
That Heaven intends—

GULDSTAD.

No, hang it; don't be frightened!
The powers above would be demented surely
To give effect to orders such as these.
No, my good sir—the cure for your disease
Is exercise for muscle, nerve, and sinew.
Don't lie there wasting all the grit that's in you
In idle dreams; cut wood, if that were all;
And then I'll say the devil's in't indeed
If one brief fortnight does not find you freed
From all your whimsies high-fantastical.

FALK.

Fetter'd by choice, like Burnell's ass, I ponder—
The flesh on this side, and the spirit yonder.
Which were it wiser I should go for first?

GULDSTAD [*filling the glasses*].

First have some punch—that quenches ire and thirst.

MRS. HALM [*looking at her watch*].

Ha! Eight o'clock! my watch is either fast, or
It's just the time we may expect the Pastor.
[*Rises, and puts things in order on the verandah.*

FALK.

What! have we parsons coming?

MISS JAY.

Don't you know?

MRS. HALM.

I told you, just a little while ago—

ANNA.

No, mother—Mr. Falk had not yet come.

MRS. HALM.

Why no, that's true; but pray don't look so glum.
Trust me, you'll be enchanted with his visit.

FALK.

A clerical enchanter; pray who is it?

MRS. HALM.

Why, Pastor Strawman, not unknown to fame.

FALK.

Indeed! Oh, yes, I think I've heard his name,
And read that in the legislative game
He comes to take a hand, with voice and vote.

STIVER.

He speaks superbly.

GULDSTAD.

When he's cleared his throat.

MISS JAY.

He's coming with his wife—

MRS. HALM.

And all their blessings—

FALK.

To give them three or four days' treat, poor dears—
Soon he'll be buried over head and ears
In Swedish muddles and official messings—
I see!

MRS. HALM [*to* FALK].

Now there's a man for you, in truth!

GULDSTAD.

They say he was a rogue, though, in his youth.

MISS JAY [*offended*].

There, Mr. Guldstad, I must break a lance!
I've heard as long as I can recollect,
Most worthy people speak with great respect
Of Pastor Strawman and his life's romance.

GULDSTAD [*laughing*].

Romance?

MISS JAY.

Romance! I call a match romantic
At which mere worldly wisdom looks askance.

FALK.

You make my curiosity gigantic.

MISS JAY [*continuing*].

But certain people always grow splenetic—
Why, goodness knows—at everything pathetic,
And scoff it down. We all know how, of late,
An unfledged, upstart undergraduate
Presumed, with brazen insolence, to declare
That "William Russell" was a poor affair!

FALK.

But what has this to do with Strawman, pray?
Is he a poem, or a Christian play?

MISS JAY [*with tears of emotion*].

No, Falk,—a man, with heart as large as day.
But when a—so to speak—mere lifeless thing
Can put such venom into envy's sting,
And stir up evil passions fierce and fell
Of such a depth—

FALK [*sympathetically*].

And such a length as well—

MISS JAY.

Why then, a man of your commanding brain
Can't fail to see—

FALK.

Oh yes, that's very plain.
But hitherto I haven't quite made out
The nature, style, and plot of this romance.
It's something quite delightful I've no doubt—
But just a little inkling in advance—

STIVER.

I will abstract, in rapid *résumé,*
The leading points.

MISS JAY.

No, I am more *au fait,*
I know the ins and outs—

MRS. HALM.

I know them too!

MISS JAY.

Oh Mrs. Halm! now let me tell it, do!
Well, Mr. Falk, you see—he passed at college
For quite a miracle of wit and knowledge,
Had admirable taste in books and dress—

MRS. HALM.

And acted—privately—with great success.

MISS JAY.

Yes, wait a bit—he painted, played and wrote—

MRS. HALM.

And don't forget his gift of anecdote.

MISS JAY.

Do give me time; I know the whole affair:
He made some verses, set them to an air,
Also his own,—and found a publisher.
O heavens! with what romantic melancholy
He played and sang his "Madrigals to Molly"!

MRS. HALM.

He was a genius, that's the simple fact.

GULDSTAD [*to himself*].

Hm! Some were of opinion he was cracked.

FALK.

A gray old stager, whose sagacious head
Was never upon mouldy parchments fed,
Says "Love makes Petrarchs, just as many lambs
And little occupation, Abrahams."
But who was Molly?

MISS JAY.

Molly? His elect,
His lady-love, whom shortly we expect.
Of a great firm her father was a member—

GULDSTAD.

A timber house.

MISS JAY [*curtly*].

I'm really not aware.

GULDSTAD.

Did a large trade in scantlings, I remember.

MISS JAY.

That is the trivial side of the affair.

FALK.

A firm?

MISS JAY [*continuing*].

Of vast resources, I'm informed.
You can imagine how the suitors swarm'd;
Gentlemen of the highest reputation.—

MRS. HALM.

Even a baronet made application.

MISS JAY.

But Molly was not to be made their catch.
She had met Strawman upon private stages;
To see him was to love him—

FALK.

And despatch
The wooing gentry home without their wages?

MRS. HALM.

Was it not just a too romantic match?

MISS JAY.

And then there was a terrible old father,
Whose sport was thrusting happy souls apart;
She had a guardian also, as I gather,
To add fresh torment to her tortured heart.
But each of them was loyal to his vow;
A straw-thatched cottage and a snow-white ewe
They dream'd of, just enough to nourish two—

MRS. HALM.

Or at the very uttermost a cow,—

MISS JAY.

In short, I've heard it from the lips of both,—
A beck, a byre, two bosoms, and one troth.

FALK.

Ah yes! And then—?

MISS JAY.

She broke with kin and class.

FALK.

She broke—?

MRS. HALM.

Broke with them.

FALK.

There's a plucky lass!

MISS JAY.

And fled to Strawman's garret—

FALK.

How? Without—
Ahem—the priestly consecration?

MISS JAY.

Shame!

MRS. HALM.

Fy, fy! my late beloved husband's name
Was on the list of sponsors—!

STIVER [*to* MISS JAY].

You're to blame
For leaving that important item out.
In a report 'tis of the utmost weight
That the chronology be accurate.
But what I never yet could comprehend
Is how on earth they managed—

FALK.

The one room
Not housing sheep and cattle, I presume.

MISS JAY [*to* STIVER].

O, but you must consider this, my friend;
There is no *Want* where Love's the guiding star;
All's right without if tender Troth's within.
[*To* FALK.
He loved her to the notes of the guitar,
And she gave lessons on the violin—

MRS. HALM.

Then all, of course, on credit they bespoke—

GULDSTAD.

Till, in a year, the timber merchant broke.

MRS. HALM.

Then Strawman had a call to north.

MISS JAY.

And there
Vowed, in a letter that I saw (as few did),
He lived but for his duty, and for her.

FALK [*as if completing her statement*].

And with those words his Life's Romance concluded.

MRS. HALM [*rising*].

How if we should go out upon the lawn,
And see if there's no prospect of them yet?

MISS JAY [*drawing on her mantle*].

It's cool already.

MRS. HALM.

Svanhild, will you get
My woollen shawl?—Come ladies, pray!

LIND [*to* ANNA, *unobserved by the others*].

Go on!

[SVANHILD *goes into the house; the others, except* FALK, *go towards the back and out to the left.* LIND, *who has followed, stops and returns.*

LIND.

My friend!

FALK.

Ah, ditto.

LIND.

Falk, your hand! The tide
Of joy's so vehement, it will perforce
Break out—

FALK.

Hullo there; you must first be tried;
Sentence and hanging follow in due course.
Now, what on earth's the matter? To conceal
From me, your friend, this treasure of your finding;
For you'll confess the inference is binding:
You've come into a prize off Fortune's wheel!

LIND.

I've snared and taken Fortune's blessed bird!

FALK.

How? Living,—and undamaged by the steel?

LIND.

Patience; I'll tell the matter in one word.
I am engaged! Conceive—!

FALK [*quickly*].

Engaged!

LIND.

It's true.
To-day,—with unimagined courage swelling,
I said,—ahem, it will not bear re-telling;—
But only think,—the sweet young maiden grew
Quite rosy-red,—but not at all enraged!
You see, Falk, what I ventured for a bride!
She listened,—and I rather think she cried;
That, sure, means "Yes"?

FALK.

If precedents decide;
Go on.

LIND.

And so we really are—engaged?

FALK.

I should conclude so; but the only way
To be quite certain, is to ask Miss Jay.

LIND.

O no, I feel so confident, so clear!
So perfectly assured, and void of fear.
[*Radiantly, in a mysterious tone.*
Hark! I had leave her fingers to caress
When from the coffee-board she drew the cover.

FALK [*lifting and emptying his glass*].

Well, flowers of spring your wedding garland dress!

LIND [*doing the same*].

And here I swear by heaven that I will love her
Until I die, with love as infinite
As now glows in me,—for she is so sweet!

FALK.

Engaged! Aha, so that was why you flung
The Holy Law and Prophets on the shelf!

LIND [*laughing*].

And you believed it was the song you sung—!

FALK.

A poet believes all things of himself.

LIND [*seriously*].

Don't think, however, Falk, that I dismiss
The theologian from my hour of bliss.
Only, I find the Book will not suffice
As Jacob's ladder unto Paradise.
I must into God's world, and seek Him there.
A boundless kindness in my heart upsprings,
I love the straw, I love the creeping things;
They also in my joy shall have a share.

FALK.

Yes, only tell me this, though—

LIND.

I have told it,—
My precious secret, and our three hearts hold it!

FALK.

But have you thought about the future?

LIND.

Thought?
I?—thought about the future? No, from this
Time forth I live but in the hour that is.
In home shall all my happiness be sought;
We hold Fate's reins, we drive her hither,
thither,
And neither friend nor mother shall have right
To say unto my budding blossom: Wither!
For I am earnest and her eyes are bright,
And so it must unfold into the light!

FALK.

Yes, Fortune likes you, you will serve her turn!

LIND.

My spirits like wild music glow and burn;
I feel myself a Titan: though a foss
Opened before me—I would leap across!

FALK.

Your love, you mean to say, in simple prose,
Has made a reindeer of you.

LIND.

Well, suppose;
But in my wildest flight, I know the nest
In which my heart's dove longs to be at rest!

FALK.

Well then, to-morrow it may fly *con brio;*
You're off into the hills with the quartette.
I'll guarantee you against cold and wet—

LIND.

Pooh, the quartette may go and climb in *trio,*
The lowly dale has mountain air for me;
Here I've the immeasurable fjord, the flowers,
Here I have warbling birds and choral bowers,
And lady Fortune's self,—for here is she!

FALK.

Ah, lady Fortune by our Northern water
Is *rara avis,*—hold her if you've caught her!

[*With a glance towards the house.*

Hist—Svanhild—

LIND.

Well; I go,—disclose to none
The secret that we share alone with one.
'Twas good of you to listen: now enfold it
Deep in your heart,—warm, glowing, as I told it.

[*He goes out in the background to the others.* FALK *looks after him a moment, and paces up and down in the garden, visibly striving to master his agitation. Presently* SVANHILD *comes out with a shawl on her arm, and is going towards the back.* FALK *approaches and gazes at her fixedly.* SVANHILD *stops.*

SVANHILD [*after a short pause*].

You gaze so at me!

FALK [*half to himself*].

Yes, 'tis there—the same;
The shadow in her eyes' deep mirror sleeping,
The roguish elf about her lips a-peeping,
It is there.

SVANHILD.

What? You frighten me.

FALK.

Your name
Is Svanhild?

SVANHILD.

Yes, you know it very well.

FALK.

But do you know the name is laughable?
I beg you to discard it from to-night!

SVANHILD.

That would be far beyond a daughter's right—

FALK [*laughing*].

Hm. "Svanhild! Svanhild!"
[*With sudden gravity.*
With your earliest breath
How came you by this prophecy of death?

SVANHILD.

Is it so grim?

FALK.

No, lovely as a song,
But for our age too great and stern and strong,
How can a modern demoiselle fill out
The ideal that heroic name expresses?
No, no, discard it with your outworn dresses.

SVANHILD.

You mean the mythical princess, no doubt—

FALK.

Who, guiltless, died beneath the horse's feet.

SVANHILD.

But now such acts are clearly obsolete.
No, no, I'll mount his saddle! There's my place!
How often have I dreamt, in pensive ease,
He bore me, buoyant, through the world apace,
His mane a flag of freedom in the breeze!

FALK.

Yes, the old tale. In "pensive ease" no mortal
Is stopped by thwarting bar or cullis'd portal;
Fearless we cleave the ether without bound;
In practice, tho', we shrewdly hug the ground;
For all love life and, having choice, will choose it;
And no man dares to leap where he may lose it.

SVANHILD.

Yes! show me but the end, I'll spurn the shore;
But let the end be worth the leaping for!
A Ballarat beyond the desert sands—
Else each will stay exactly where he stands.

FALK [*sarcastically*].

I grasp the case;—the due conditions fail.

SVANHILD [*eagerly*].

Exactly: what's the use of spreading sail
When there is not a breath of wind astir?

FALK [*ironically*].

Yes, what's the use of plying whip and spur
When there is not a penny of reward
For him who tears him from the festal board,
And mounts, and dashes headlong to perdition?
Such doing for the deed's sake asks a knight,
And knighthood's now an idle superstition.
That was your meaning, possibly?

SVANHILD.

Quite right.
Look at that fruit tree in the orchard close,—
No blossom on its barren branches blows.
You should have seen last year with what brave airs
It staggered underneath its world of pears.

FALK [*uncertain*].

No doubt, but what's the moral you impute?

SVANHILD [*with finesse*].

O, among other things, the bold unreason
Of modern Zacharies who seek for fruit.
If the tree blossom'd to excess last season,
You must not crave the blossoms back in this.

FALK.

I knew you'd find your footing in the ways
Of old Romance.

SVANHILD.

Yes, modern virtue is
Of quite another stamp. Who now arrays
Himself to battle for the truth? Who'll stake
His life and person fearless for truth's sake?
Where is the hero?

FALK [*looking keenly at her*].

Where is the Valkyria?

SVANHILD [*shaking her head*].

Valkyrias find no market in this land!
When the faith lately was assailed in Syria,
Did you go out with the crusader-band?
No, but on paper you were warm and willing,—
And sent the "Clerical Gazette" a shilling.

[*Pause.* FALK *is about to retort, but checks himself, and goes into the garden.*

SVANHILD.

[*After watching him a moment, approaches him and asks gently:*

Falk, are you angry?

FALK.

No, I only brood,—

SVANHILD [*with thoughtful sympathy*].

You seem to be two natures, still at feud,—
Unreconciled—

FALK.

I know it well.

SVANHILD [*impetuously*].

But why?

FALK [*losing self-control*].

Why, why? Because I hate to go about
With soul bared boldly to the vulgar eye,
As Jock and Jennie hang their passions out;
To wear my glowing heart upon my sleeve,
Like women in low dresses. You, alone,
Svanhild, you only,—you, I did believe,—
Well, it is past, that dream, for ever flown.—

[*She goes to the summer-house and looks out; he follows.*

You listen—?

SVANHILD.

To another voice, that sings.
Hark! every evening when the sun's at rest,
A little bird floats hither on beating wings,—
See there—it darted from its leafy nest—
And, do you know, it is my faith,—as oft
As God makes any songless soul, He sends
A little bird to be her friend of friends,
And sing for ever in her garden-croft.

FALK [*picking up a stone*].

Then must the owner and the bird be near,
Or its song's squandered on a stranger's ear.

SVANHILD.

Yes, that is true; but I've discovered mine.
Of speech and song I am denied the power,
But when it warbles in its leafy bower,
Poems flow in upon my brain like wine—
Ah, yes,—they fleet—they are not to be won—

[FALK *throws the stone.* SVANHILD screams.

O God, you've hit it! Ah, what have you done!

[*She hurries out to the right and then quickly returns.*

O pity! pity!

FALK [*in passionate agitation*].

No,—but eye for eye,
Svanhild, and tooth for tooth. Now you'll attend
No further greetings from your garden-friend,
No guerdon from the land of melody.
That is my vengeance: as you slew, I slay.

SVANHILD.

I slew?

FALK.

You slew. Until this very day,
A clear-voiced song-bird warbled in my soul;
See,—now one passing bell for both may toll—
You've killed it!

SVANHILD.

Have I?

FALK.

Yes, for you have slain
My young, high-hearted, joyous exultation—
[*Contemptuously.*
By your betrothal!

SVANHILD.

How! But pray, explain—!

FALK.

O, it's in full accord with expectation;
He gets his licence, enters orders, speeds to
A post,—as missionary in the West—

SVANHILD [*in the same tone*].

A pretty penny, also, he succeeds to;—
For it is Lind you speak of—?

FALK.

You know best
Of whom I speak.

SVANHILD [*with a subdued smile*].

As the bride's sister, true,
I cannot help—

FALK.

Great God! It is not you—?

SVANHILD.

Who win this overplus of bliss? Ah no!

FALK [*with almost childish joy*].

It is not you! O God be glorified!
What love, what mercy does He not bestow!
I shall not see you as another's bride;—
'Twas but the fire of pain He bade me bear—
[*Tries to seize her hand.*
O hear me, Svanhild, hear me then—

SVANHILD [*pointing quickly to the background*].

See there!

[*She goes towards the house. At the same moment* MRS. HALM, ANNA, MISS JAY, GULDSTAD, STIVER, *and* LIND *emerge from the background. During the previous scene the sun has set; it is now dark.*

MRS. HALM [*to* SVANHILD].

The Strawmans may be momently expected.
Where have you been?

MISS JAY [*after glancing at* FALK].

Your colour's very high.

SVANHILD.

A little face-ache; it will soon pass by.

MRS. HALM.

And yet you walk at nightfall unprotected?
Arrange the room, and see that tea is ready;
Let everything be nice; I know the lady.

[SVANHILD *goes in.*

STIVER [*to* FALK].

What is the colour of this parson's coat?

FALK.

I guess bread-taxers would not catch his vote.

STIVER.

How if one made allusion to the store
Of verses, yet unpublished, in my drawer?

FALK.

It might do something.

STIVER.

Would to heaven it might!
Our wedding's imminent; our purses light.
Courtship's a very serious affair.

FALK.

Just so: "*Qu'allais-tu faire dans cette galère?*"

STIVER.

Is courtship a "galère"?

FALK.

No, married lives;—
All servitude, captivity, and gyves.

STIVER [*seeing* MISS JAY *approach*].

You little know what wealth a man obtains
From woman's eloquence and woman's brains.

MISS JAY [*aside to* STIVER].

Will Guldstad give us credit, think you?

STIVER [*peevishly*].

I
Am not quite certain of it yet: I'll try.

[*They withdraw in conversation;* LIND *and* ANNA *approach.*

LIND [*aside to* FALK].

I can't endure it longer; in post-haste
I must present her—

FALK.

You had best refrain,
And not initiate the eye profane
Into your mysteries—

LIND.

That would be a jest!—
From you, my fellow-boarder, and my mate,
To keep concealed my new-found happy state!
Nay, now, my head with Fortune's oil anointed—

FALK.

You think the occasion good to get it curled?
Well, my good friend, you won't be disappointed;
Go and announce your union to the world!

LIND.

Other reflections also weigh with me,
And one of more especial gravity;
Say that there lurked among our motley band
Some sneaking, sly pretender to her hand;
Say, his attentions became undisguised,—
We should be disagreeably compromised.

FALK.

Yes, it is true; it had escaped my mind,
You for a higher office were designed,
Love as his young licentiate has retained you;
Shortly you'll get a permanent position;
But it would be defying all tradition
If at the present moment he ordained you.

LIND.

Yes if the merchant does not—

FALK.

What of him?

ANNA [*troubled*].

Oh, it is Lind's unreasonable whim.

LIND.

Hush; I've a deep foreboding that the man
Will rob me of my treasure, if he can.
The fellow, as we know, comes daily down,
Is rich, unmarried, takes you round the town;
In short, my own, regard it as we will,
There are a thousand things that bode us ill.

ANNA [*sighing*].

Oh, it's too bad; to-day was so delicious!

FALK [*sympathetically to* LIND].

Don't wreck your joy, unfoundedly suspicious,
Don't hoist your flag till time the truth disclose—

ANNA.

Great God! Miss Jay is looking; hush, be still!

[*She and* LIND *withdraw in different directions.*

FALK [*looking after* LIND].

So to the ruin of his youth he goes.

GULDSTAD.

[*Who has meantime been conversing on the steps with* MRS. HALM *and* MISS JAY, *approaches* FALK *and slaps him on the shoulder.*

Well, brooding on a poem?

FALK.

No, a play.

GULDSTAD.

The deuce;—I never heard it was your line.

FALK.

O no, the author is a friend of mine,
And your acquaintance also, I daresay.
The knave's a dashing writer, never doubt.
Only imagine, in a single day
He's worked a perfect little Idyll out.

GULDSTAD [*slily*].

With happy ending, doubtless!

FALK.

You're aware,
No curtain falls but on a plighted pair.
Thus with the Trilogy's First Part we've reckoned;
But now the poet's labour-throes begin;
The Comedy of Troth-plight, Part the Second,
Thro' five insipid Acts he has to spin,
And of that staple, finally, compose
Part Third,—or Wedlock's Tragedy, in prose.

GULDSTAD [*smiling*].

The poet's vein is catching, it would seem.

FALK.

Really? How so, pray?

GULDSTAD.

Since I also pore
And ponder over a poetic scheme,—
[*Mysteriously.*
An actuality—and not a dream.

FALK.

And pray, who is the hero of your theme?

GULDSTAD.

I'll tell you that to-morrow—not before.

FALK.

It is yourself!

GULDSTAD.

You think me equal to it?

FALK.

I'm sure no other mortal man could do it.
But then the heroine? No city maid,
I'll swear, but of the country, breathing balm?

GULDSTAD [*lifting his finger*].

Ah,—that's the point, and must not be betrayed!—
[*Changing his tone.*
Pray tell me your opinion of Miss Halm.

FALK.

O you're best able to pronounce upon her;
My voice can neither credit nor dishonour,—
[*Smiling.*
But just take care no mischief-maker blot
This fine poetic scheme of which you talk.
Suppose I were so shameless as to balk
The meditated climax of the plot?

GULDSTAD [*good-naturedly*].

Well, I would cry "Amen," and change my plan.

FALK.

What!

GULDSTAD.

Why, you see, you are a letter'd man;
How monstrous were it if your skill'd design
Were ruined by a bungler's hand like mine!
[*Retires to the background.*

FALK [*in passing, to* LIND].

Yes, you were right; the merchant's really scheming
The ruin of your new-won happiness.

LIND [*aside to* ANNA].

Now then you see, my doubting was not dreaming;
We'll go this very moment and confess.
[*They approach* MRS. HALM, *who is standing with* MISS JAY *by the house.*

GULDSTAD [*conversing with* STIVER].
'Tis a fine evening.

STIVER.
Very likely,—when
A man's disposed—

GULDSTAD [*facetiously*].
What, all not running smooth
In true love's course?

STIVER.
Not that exactly—

FALK [*coming up*].
Then
With your engagement?

STIVER.
That's about the truth.

FALK.
Hurrah! Your spendthrift pocket has a groat
Or two still left, it seems, of poetry.

STIVER [*stiffly*].
I cannot see what poetry has got
To do with my engagement, or with me.

FALK.
You are not meant to see; when lovers prove
What love is, all is over with their love.

GULDSTAD [*to* STIVER].

But if there's matter for adjustment, pray
Let's hear it.

STIVER.

I've been pondering all day
Whether the thing is proper to disclose,
But still the Ayes are balanced by the Noes.

FALK.

I'll right you in one sentence. Ever since
As plighted lover you were first installed,
You've felt yourself, if I may say so, galled—

STIVER.

And sometimes to the quick.

FALK.

You've had to wince
Beneath a crushing load of obligations
That you'd send packing, if good form permitted.
That's what's the matter.

STIVER.

Monstrous accusations!
My legal debts I've honestly acquitted;
But other bonds next month are falling due;
[*To* GULDSTAD.
When a man weds, you see, he gets a wife—

FALK [*triumphant*].

Now your youth's heaven once again is blue,
There rang an echo from your old song-life!
That's how it is: I read you thro' and thro';
Wings, wings were all you wanted,—and a knife!

STIVER.

A knife?

FALK.

Yes, Resolution's knife, to sever
Each captive bond, and set you free for ever,
To soar—

STIVER [*angrily*].

Nay, now you're insolent beyond
Endurance! Me to charge with violation
Of law,—me, me with plotting to abscond!
It's libellous, malicious defamation,
Insult and calumny—

FALK.

Are you insane?
What is all this about? Explain! Explain!

GULDSTAD [*laughingly to* STIVER].

Yes, clear your mind of all this balderdash!
What do you want?

STIVER [*pulling himself together*].

A trifling loan in cash.

FALK.

A loan!

STIVER [*hurriedly to* GULDSTAD].

That is, I mean to say, you know,
A voucher for a ten pound note, or so.

MISS JAY [*to* LIND *and* ANNA].

I wish you joy! How lovely, how delicious!

GULDSTAD [*going up to the ladies*].

Pray what has happened?

[*To himself.*] This was unpropitious.

FALK [*throws his arms about* STIVER'S *neck*].

Hurrah! the trumpet's dulcet notes proclaim
A brother born to you in Amor's name!

[*Drags him to the others.*

MISS JAY [*to the gentlemen*].

Think! Lind and Anna—think!—have plighted hearts,
Affianced lovers!

MRS. HALM [*with tears of emotion*].

'Tis the eighth in order
Who well-provided from this house departs;

[*To* FALK.

Seven nieces wedded—always with a boarder—

[*Is overcome; presses her handkerchief to her eyes.*

MISS JAY [*to* ANNA].

Well, there will come a flood of gratulation!
[*Caresses her with emotion.*

LIND [*seizing* FALK'S *hand*].

My friend, I walk in rapt intoxication!

FALK.

Hold! As a plighted man you are a member
Of Rapture's Temperance-association.
Observe its rules;—no orgies here, remember!
[*Turning to* GULDSTAD *sympathetically.*
Well, my good sir!

GULDSTAD [*beaming with pleasure*].

I think this promises
All happiness for both.

FALK [*staring at him*].

You seem to stand
The shock with exemplary self-command.
That's well.

GULDSTAD.

What do you mean, sir?

FALK.

Only this;
That inasmuch as you appeared to feed
Fond expectations of your own—

GULDSTAD.

Indeed?

FALK.

At any rate, you were upon the scent.
You named Miss Halm; you stood upon this spot
And asked me—

GULDSTAD [*smiling*].

There are two, though, are there not?

FALK.

It was—the other sister that you meant?

GULDSTAD.

That sister, yes, the other one,—just so.
Judge for yourself, when you have come to know
That sister better, if she has not in her
Merits which, if they were divined, would win her
A little more regard than we bestow.

FALK [*coldly*].

Her virtues are of every known variety
I'm sure.

GULDSTAD.

Not quite; the accent of society
She cannot hit exactly; there she loses.

FALK.

A grievous fault.

GULDSTAD.

But if her mother chooses
To spend a winter on her, she'll come out of it
Queen of them all, I'll wager.

FALK.

Not a doubt of it.

GULDSTAD [*laughing*].

Young women are odd creatures, to be sure!

FALK [*gaily*].

Like winter rye-seed, canopied secure
By frost and snow, invisibly they sprout.

GULDSTAD.

Then in the festive ball-room bedded out—

FALK.

With equivoque and scandal for manure—

GULDSTAD.

And when the April sun shines—

FALK.

There the blade is;
The seed shot up in mannikin green ladies!

[LIND *comes up and seizes* FALK'S *hand.*

LIND.

How well I chose,—past understanding well;—
I feel a bliss that nothing can dispel.

GULDSTAD.

There stands your mistress; tell us, if you can,
The right demeanor for a plighted man.

LIND [*perturbed*].

That's a third person's business to declare.

GULDSTAD [*joking*].

Ill-tempered! This to Anna's ears I'll bear.
[*Goes to the ladies.*

LIND [*looking after him*].

Can such a man be tolerated?

FALK.

You
Mistook his aim, however,—

LIND.

And how so?

FALK.

It was not Anna that he had in view.

LIND.

How, was it Svanhild?

FALK.

Well, I hardly know.
[*Whimsically.*
Forgive me, martyr to another's cause!

LIND.

What do you mean?

FALK.

You've read the news to-night?

LIND.

No.

FALK.

Do so. There 'tis told in black and white
Of one who, ill-luck's bitter counsel taking,
Had his sound teeth extracted from his jaws
Because his cousin-german's teeth were aching.

MISS JAY [*looking out to the left*].

Here comes the priest!

MRS. HALM.

Now see a man of might!

STIVER.

Five children, six, seven, eight—

FALK.

And, heavens, all recent!

MISS JAY.

Ugh! it is almost to be called indecent.

[*A carriage has meantime been heard stopping outside to the left.* STRAWMAN, *his wife, and eight little girls, all in travelling dress, enter one by one.*

MRS. HALM [*advancing to meet them*].

Welcome, a hearty welcome!

STRAWMAN.

Thank you.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

Is it

A party?

MRS. HALM.

No, dear madam, not at all.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

If we disturb you—

MRS. HALM.

Au contraire, your visit
Could in no wise more opportunely fall.
My Anna's just engaged.

STRAWMAN [*shaking* ANNA'S *hand with unction*].

Ah then, I must
Bear witness;—Lo! in wedded Love's presented
A treasure such as neither moth nor rust
Corrupt—if it be duly supplemented.

MRS. HALM.

But how delightful that your little maids
Should follow you to town.

STRAWMAN.

Four tender blades
We have besides.

MRS. HALM.

Ah, really?

STRAWMAN.

Three of whom
Are still too infantine to take to heart
A loving father's absence, when I come
To town for sessions.

MISS JAY [*to* MRS. HALM, *bidding farewell*].

Now I must depart.

MRS. HALM.

O, it is still so early!

MISS JAY.

I must fly
To town and spread the news. The Storms, I know,
Go late to rest, they will be up; and oh!
How glad the aunts will be! Now, dear, put by
Your shyness; for to-morrow a spring-tide
Of callers will flow in from every side!

MRS. HALM.

Well, then, good-night.

[*To the others.*

Now friends, what would you say
To drinking tea?

[*To* MRS. STRAWMAN.

Pray, madam, lead the way.

[MRS. HALM, STRAWMAN, *his wife and children, with* GULDSTAD, LIND, *and* ANNA *go into the house.*

MISS JAY [*taking* STIVER'S *arm*].

Now let's be tender! Look how softly floats
Queen Luna on her throne o'er lawn and lea!—
Well, but you are not looking!

STIVER [*crossly*].

Yes, I see;
I'm thinking of the promissory notes.

[*They go out to the left.* FALK, *who has been continuously watching* STRAWMAN *and his wife, remains behind alone in the garden. It is now dark; the house is lighted up.*

FALK.

All is as if burnt out;—all desolate, dead—!
So thro' the world they wander, two and two;
Charred wreckage, like the blackened stems that strew
The forest when the withering fire is fled.

Far as the eye can travel, all is drought,
And nowhere peeps one spray of verdure out!

[SVANHILD *comes out on to the verandah with a flowering rose-tree which she sets down.*

Yes one—yes one—!

SVANHILD.

Falk, in the dark?

FALK.

And fearless!
Darkness to me is fair, and light is cheerless.
But are not you afraid in yonder walls
Where the lamp's light on sallow corpses falls—

SVANHILD.

Shame!

FALK [*looking after* STRAWMAN *who appears at the window*].

He was once so brilliant and so strong;
Warred with the world to win his mistress; passed
For Custom's doughtiest iconoclast;
And poured forth love in pæans of glad song—!
Look at him now! In solemn robes and wraps,
A two-legged drama on his own collapse!

And she, the limp-skirt slattern, with the shoes
Heel-trodden, that squeak and clatter in her traces,
This is the winged maid who was his Muse
And escort to the kingdom of the graces!
Of all that fire this puff of smoke's the end!
Sic transit gloria amoris, friend.

SVANHILD.

Yes, it is wretched, wretched past compare.
I know of no one's lot that I would share.

FALK [*eagerly*].

Then let us two rise up and bid defiance
To this same order Art, not Nature, bred!

SVANHILD [*shaking her head*].

Then were the cause for which we made alliance
Ruined, as sure as this is earth we tread.

FALK.

No, triumph waits upon two souls in unity.
To Custom's parish-church no more we'll wend,
Seatholders in the Philistine community.
See, Personality's one aim and end
Is to be independent, free and true.
In that I am not wanting, nor are you.
A fiery spirit pulses in your veins,
For thoughts that master, you have words that burn;
The corslet of convention, that constrains
The beating hearts of other maids, you spurn.

The voice that you were born with will not chime to
The chorus Custom's baton gives the time to.

SVANHILD.

And do you think pain has not often pressed
Tears from my eyes, and quiet from my breast?
I longed to shape my way to my own bent—

FALK.

"In pensive ease?"

SVANHILD.

O no, 'twas sternly meant.
But then the aunts came in with well-intended
Advice, the matter must be sifted, weighed—
[*Coming nearer.*
"In pensive ease," you say; oh no, I made
A bold experiment—in art.

FALK.

Which ended—?

SVANHILD.

In failure. I lacked talent for the brush.
The thirst for freedom, tho', I could not crush;
Checked at the easel, it essayed the stage—

FALK.

That plan was shattered also, I engage?

SVANHILD.

Upon the eldest aunt's suggestion, yes;
She much preferred a place as governess—

FALK.

But of all this I never heard a word!

SVANHILD [*smiling*].

No wonder; they took care that none was heard.
They trembled at the risk "my future" ran
If this were whispered to unmarried Man.

FALK [*after gazing a moment at her in meditative sympathy*].

That such must be your lot I long had guessed.
When first I met you, I can well recall,
You seemed to me quite other than the rest,
Beyond the comprehension of them all.
They sat at table,—fragrant tea a-brewing,
And small-talk humming with the tea in tune,
The young girls blushing and the young men cooing,
Like pigeons on a sultry afternoon.
Old maids and matrons volubly averred
Morality and faith's supreme felicity,
Young wives were loud in praise of domesticity,
While you stood lonely like a mateless bird.
And when at last the gabbling clamour rose
To a tea-orgy, a debauch of prose,
You seemed a piece of silver, newly minted,
Among foul notes and coppers dulled and dinted.

You were a coin imported, alien, strange,
Here valued at another rate of change,
Not passing current in that babel mart
Of poetry and butter, cheese and art.
Then—while Miss Jay in triumph took the field—

SVANHILD [*gravely*].

Her knight behind her, like a champion bold,
His hat upon his elbow, like a shield—

FALK.

Your mother nodded to your untouched cup:
"Drink, Svanhild dear, before your tea grows cold."
And then you drank the vapid liquor up,
The mawkish brew beloved of young and old.
But that name gripped me with a sudden spell;
The grim old Völsungs as they fought and fell,
With all their faded æons, seemed to rise
In never-ending line before my eyes.
In you I saw a Svanhild, like the old,
But fashioned to the modern age's mould.
Sick of its hollow warfare is the world;
Its lying banner it would fain have furled;
But when the world does evil, its offence
Is blotted in the blood of innocence.

SVANHILD [*with gentle irony*].

I think, at any rate, the fumes of tea
Must answer for that direful fantasy;
But 'tis your least achievement, past dispute,
To hear the spirit speaking, when 'tis mute.

FALK [*with emotion*].

Nay, Svanhild, do not jest: behind your scoff
Tears glitter,—O, I see them plain enough.
And I see more: when you to dust are fray'd,
And kneaded to a formless lump of clay,
Each bungling dilettante's scalpel-blade
On you his dull devices shall display.
The world usurps the creature of God's hand
And sets its image in the place of His,
Transforms, enlarges that part, lightens this;
And when upon the pedestal you stand
Complete, cries out in triumph: "Now she is
At last what woman ought to be: Behold,
How plastically calm, how marble-cold!
Bathed in the lamplight's soft irradiation,
How well in keeping with the decoration!"

[*Passionately seizing her hand.*

But if you are to die, live first! Come forth
With me into the glory of God's earth!
Soon, soon the gilded cage will claim its prize.
The Lady thrives there, but the Woman dies,
And I love nothing but the Woman in you.
There, if they will, let others woo and win you,
But here, my spring of life began to shoot,
Here my Song-tree put forth its firstling fruit;
Here I found wings and flight:—Svanhild, I know it,
Only be mine,—here I shall grow a poet!

SVANHILD [*in gentle reproof, withdrawing her hand*].

O, why have you betrayed yourself? How sweet
It was when we as friends could freely meet!

You should have kept your counsel. Can we stake
Our bliss upon a word that we may break?
Now you have spoken, all is over.

FALK.

No!
I've pointed to the goal,—now leap with me,
My high-souled Svanhild—if you dare, and show
That you have heart and courage to be free.

SVANHILD.

Be free?

FALK.

Yes, free, for freedom's all-in-all
Is absolutely to fulfil our Call.
And you by heaven were destined, I know well,
To be my bulwark against beauty's spell.
I, like my falcon namesake, have to swing
Against the wind, if I would reach the sky!
You are the breeze I must be breasted by,
You, only you, put vigour in my wing:
Be mine, be mine, until the world shall take you,
When leaves are falling, then our paths shall part.
Sing unto me the treasures of your heart,
And for each song another song I'll make you;
So may you pass into the lamplit glow
Of age, as forests fade without a throe.

SVANHILD [*with suppressed bitterness*].

I cannot thank you, for your words betray
The meaning of your kind solicitude.
You eye me as a boy a sallow, good
To cut and play the flute on for a day.

FALK.

Yes, better than to linger in the swamp
Till autumn choke it with her grey mists damp!
[*Vehemently.*
You must! you shall! To me you must present
What God to you so bountifully lent.
I speak in song what you in dreams have meant.
See yonder bird I innocently slew,
Her warbling was Song's book of books for you.
O, yield your music as she yielded hers!
My life shall be that music set to verse!

SVANHILD.

And when you know me, when my songs are flown,
And my last requiem chanted from the bough,—
What then?

FALK [*observing her*].

What then? Ah well, remember now!
[*Pointing to the garden.*

SVANHILD [*gently*].

Yes, I remember you can drive a stone.

FALK [*with a scornful laugh*].

This is your vaunted soul of freedom therefore!
All daring, if it had an end to dare for!
[*Vehemently.*
I've shown you one; now, once for all, your yea
Or nay.

SVANHILD.

You know the answer I must make you:
I never can accept you in your way.

FALK [*coldly, breaking off*].

Then there's an end of it; the world may take you!

[SVANHILD *has silently turned away. She supports her hands upon the verandah railing, and rests her head upon them.*

FALK.

[*Walks several times up and down, takes a cigar, stops near her and says, after a pause:*

You think the topic of my talk to-night
Extremely ludicrous, I should not wonder?

[*Pauses for an answer.* SVANHILD *is silent.*

I'm very conscious that it was a blunder;
Sister's and daughter's love alone possess you;
Henceforth I'll wear kid gloves when I address you,
Sure, so, of being understood aright.

[*Pauses, but as* SVANHILD *remains motionless, he turns and goes towards the right.*

SVANHILD [*lifting her head after a brief silence, looking at him and drawing nearer*].

Now I will recompense your kind intent
To save me, with an earnest admonition.
That falcon-image gave me sudden vision
What your "emancipation" really meant.
You said you were the falcon, that must fight
Athwart the wind if it would reach the sky,
I was the breeze you must be breasted by,
Else vain were all your faculty of flight;
How pitifully mean! How paltry! Nay
How ludicrous, as you yourself divined!
That seed, however, fell not by the way,
But bred another fancy in my mind
Of a far more illuminating kind.
You, as I saw it, were no falcon, but
A tuneful dragon, out of paper cut,
Whose Ego holds a secondary station,
Dependent on the string for animation;
Its breast was scrawled with promises to pay
In cash poetic,—at some future day;
The wings were stiff with barbs and shafts of wit
That wildly beat the air, but never hit;
The tail was a satiric rod in pickle
To castigate the town's infirmities,
But all it compass'd was to lightly tickle
The casual doer of some small amiss.
So you lay helpless at my feet, imploring:
"O raise me, how and where is all the same!
Give me the power of singing and of soaring,
No matter at what cost of bitter blame!"

FALK [*clenching his fists in inward agitation*].

Heaven be my witness—!

SVANHILD.

No, you must be told:—
For such a childish sport I am too old.
But you, whom Nature made for high endeavour,
Are you content the fields of air to tread
Hanging your poet's life upon a thread
That at my pleasure I can slip and sever?

FALK [*hurriedly*].

What is the date to-day?

SVANHILD [*more gently*].

Why, now, that's right!
Mind well this day, and heed it, and beware;
Trust to your own wings only for your flight,
Sure, if they do not break, that they will bear.
The paper poem for the desk is fit,
That which is lived alone has life in it;
That only has the wings that scale the height;
Choose now between them, poet: be, or write!

[*Nearer to him.*

Now I have done what you besought me; now
My requiem is chanted from the bough;
My only one; now all my songs are flown;
Now, if you will, I'm ready for the stone!

[*She goes into the house;* FALK *remains motionless, looking after her; far out on the fjord is seen a boat, from which the following chorus is faintly heard:*

CHORUS.

My wings I open, my sails spread wide,
And cleave like an eagle life's glassy tide;
Gulls follow my furrow's foaming;
Overboard with the ballast of care and cark;
And what if I shatter my roaming bark,
It is passing sweet to be roaming!

FALK [*starting from a reverie*].

What, music? Ah, it will be Lind's quartette
Getting their jubilation up.—Well met!

[*To* GULDSTAD, *who enters with an overcoat on his arm.*

Ah, slipping off, sir?

GULDSTAD.

Yes, with your goodwill.
But let me first put on my overcoat.
We prose-folks are susceptible to chill;
The night wind takes us by the tuneless throat.
Good evening!

FALK.

Sir, a word ere you proceed!
Show me a task, a mighty one, you know—!
I'm going in for life—!

GULDSTAD [*with ironical emphasis*].

Well, in you go!
You'll find that you are in for it, indeed.

FALK [*looking reflectively at him, says slowly*].

There is my program, furnished in a phrase.

[*In a lively outburst.*

Now I have wakened from my dreaming days,
I've cast the die of life's supreme transaction,
I'll show you—else the devil take me—

GULDSTAD.

Fie,
No cursing: curses never scared a fly.

FALK.

Words, words, no more, but action, only action!
I will reverse the plan of the Creation;—
Six days were lavish'd in that occupation;
My world's still lying void and desolate,
Hurrah, to-morrow, Sunday—I'll create!

GULDSTAD [*laughing*].

Yes, strip, and tackle it like a man, that's right!
But first go in and sleep on it. Good-night!

[*Goes out to the left.* SVANHILD *appears in the room over the verandah; she shuts the window and draws down the blind.*

FALK.

No, first I'll act. I've slept too long and late.

[*Looks up at* SVANHILD'S *window, and exclaims, as if seized with a sudden resolution:*

Good-night! Good-night! Sweet dreams to-night be thine;
To-morrow, Svanhild, thou art plighted mine!

[*Goes out quickly to the right; from the water the* CHORUS *is heard again.*

CHORUS.

Maybe I shall shatter my roaming bark,
But it's passing sweet to be roaming!

[*The boat slowly glides away as the curtain falls.*

ACT SECOND.

Sunday afternoon. Well-dressed ladies and gentlemen are drinking coffee on the verandah. Several of the guests appear through the open glass door in the garden-room; the following song is heard from within.

CHORUS.

Welcome, welcome, new plighted pair
To the merry ranks of the plighted!
Now you may revel as free as air,
Caress without stint and kiss without care,—
No longer of footfall affrighted.

Now you are licensed, wherever you go,
To the rapture of cooing and billing;
Now you have leisure love's seed to sow,
Water, and tend it, and make it grow;—
Let us see you've a talent for tilling!

MISS JAY [*within*].

Ah Lind, if I only had chanced to hear,
I would have teased you!

A LADY [*within*].

How vexatious though!

ANOTHER LADY [*in the doorway*].
Dear Anna, did he ask in writing?

AN AUNT.
No!

MISS JAY.
Mine did.

A LADY [*on the verandah*].
How long has it been secret, dear?
[*Runs into the room.*

MISS JAY.
To-morrow there will be the ring to choose.

LADIES [*eagerly*].
We'll take his measure!

MISS JAY.
Nay; that she must do.

MRS. STRAWMAN [*on the verandah, to a lady who is busy with embroidery*].
What kind of knitting-needles do you use?

A SERVANT [*in the door with a coffee-pot*].
More coffee, madam?

A LADY.
Thanks, a drop or two.

MISS JAY [*to* ANNA].

How fortunate you've got your new manteau
Next week to go your round of visits in!

AN ELDERLY LADY [*at the window*].

When shall we go and order the trousseau?

MRS. STRAWMAN.

How are they selling cotton-bombasine?

A GENTLEMAN [*to some ladies on the verandah*].

Just look at Lind and Anna; what's his sport?

LADIES [*with shrill ecstasy*].

Gracious, he kissed her glove!

OTHERS [*similarly, springing up*].

No! Kiss'd it? Really?

LIND [*appears, red and embarrassed, in the doorway*].

O, stuff and nonsense! [*Disappears.*

MISS JAY.

Yes, I saw it clearly.

STIVER

[*in the door, with a coffee-cup in one hand and a biscuit in the other*].

The witnesses must not mislead the court;
I here make affidavit, they're in error.

MISS JAY [*within*].

Come forward, Anna; stand before this mirror!

SOME LADIES [*calling*].

You, too, Lind!

MISS JAY.

Back to back! A little nearer!

LADIES.

Come, let us see by how much she is short.

[*All run into the garden-room; laughter and shrill talk are heard for a while from within.*

[FALK, *who during the preceding scene has been walking about in the garden, advances into the foreground, stops and looks in until the noise has somewhat abated.*

FALK.

There love's romance is being done to death.—
The butcher once who boggled at the slaughter,
Prolonging needlessly the ox's breath,—
He got his twenty days of bread and water;
But these—these butchers yonder—they go free. [*Clenches his fist.*
I could be tempted—; hold, words have no worth,
I've sworn it, action only from henceforth!

LIND [*coming hastily but cautiously out*].

Thank God, they're talking fashions; now's my chance
To slip away—

FALK.

Ha, Lind, you've drawn the prize
Of luck,—congratulations buzz and dance
All day about you, like a swarm of flies.

LIND.

They're all at heart so kindly and so nice;
But rather fewer clients would suffice.
Their helping hands begin to gall and fret me;
I'll get a moment's respite, if they'll let me.
[*Going out to the right.*

FALK.

Whither away?

LIND.

Our den;—it has a lock;
In case you find the oak is sported, knock.

FALK.

But shall I not fetch Anna to you?

LIND.

No—
If she wants anything, she'll let me know.
Last night we were discussing until late;
We've settled almost everything of weight;
Besides I think it scarcely goes with piety
To have too much of one's beloved's society.

FALK.

Yes, you are right; for daily food we need
A simple diet.

LIND.

Pray excuse me, friend.
I want a whiff of reason and the weed;
I haven't smoked for three whole days on end.
My blood was pulsing in such agitation,
I trembled for rejection all the time—

FALK.

Yes, you may well desire recuperation—

LIND.

And won't tobacco's flavour be sublime!

[*Goes out to the right.* MISS JAY *and some other* LADIES *come out of the garden-room.*

MISS JAY [*to* FALK].

That was he surely?

FALK.

Yes, your hunted deer.

LADIES.

To run away from us!

OTHERS.

For shame! For shame!

FALK.

'Tis a bit shy at present, but, no fear,
A week of servitude will make him tame.

MISS JAY [*looking round*].
Where is he hid?

FALK.
His present hiding-place
Is in the garden loft, our common lair;
[*Blandly.*
But let me beg you not to seek him there;
Give him a breathing time!

MISS JAY.
Well, good: the grace
Will not be long, tho'.

FALK.
Nay, be generous!
Ten minutes,—then begin the game again.
He has an English sermon on the brain.

MISS JAY.
An English—?

LADIES.
O you laugh! You're fooling us!

FALK.
I'm in grim earnest. 'Tis his fixed intention
To take a charge among the emigrants,
And therefore—

MISS JAY [*with horror*].
Heavens, he had the face to mention
That mad idea? [*To the ladies.*
O quick—fetch all the aunts!
Anna, her mother, Mrs. Strawman too.

LADIES [*agitated*].
This must be stopped!

ALL.
We'll make a great ado!

MISS JAY.
Thank God, they're coming.

[*To* ANNA, *who comes from the garden-room with* STRAWMAN, *his wife and children,* STIVER, GULDSTAD, MRS. HALM *and the other guests.*

MISS JAY.
Do you know what Lind
Has secretly determined in his mind?
To go as missionary—

ANNA.
Yes, I know.

MRS. HALM.
And you've agreed—!

ANNA [*embarrassed*].
That I will also go.

MISS JAY [*indignant*].
He's talked this stuff to you!

LADIES [*clasping their hands together*].
What tyranny!

FALK.

But think, his Call that would not be denied—!

MISS JAY.

Tut, that's what people follow when they're free:
A bridegroom follows nothing but his bride.—
No, my sweet Anna, ponder, I entreat:
You, reared in comfort from your earliest breath—?

FALK.

Yet, sure, to suffer for the faith is sweet!

MISS JAY.

Is one to suffer for one's bridegroom's faith?
That is a rather novel point of view.
[*To the ladies.*
Ladies, attend!
[*Takes* ANNA'S *arm.*
Now listen; then repeat
For his instruction what he has to do.

[*They go into the background and out to the right in eager talk with several of the ladies; the other guests disperse in groups about the garden.* FALK *stops* STRAWMAN, *whose wife and children keep close to him.* GULDSTAD *goes to and fro during the following conversation.*

FALK.

Come, pastor, help young fervour in its fight,
Before they lure Miss Anna from her vows.

STRAWMAN [*in clerical cadence*].

The wife must be submissive to the spouse;—
[*Reflecting.*
But if I apprehended him aright,
His Call's a problematical affair,
The Offering altogether in the air—

FALK.

Pray do not judge so rashly. I can give
You absolute assurance, as I live,
His Call is definite and incontestable—

STRAWMAN [*seeing it in a new light*].

Ah—if there's something fixed—investable—
Per annum—then I've nothing more to say.

FALK [*impatiently*].

You think the most of what I count the least;
I mean the inspiration,—not the pay!

STRAWMAN [*with an unctuous smile*].

Pay is the first condition of a priest
In Asia, Africa, America,
Or where you will. Ah yes, if he were free,
My dear young friend, I willingly agree,
The thing might pass; but, being pledged and bound,
He'll scarcely find the venture very sound.
Reflect, he's young and vigorous, sure to found
A little family in time; assume his will
To be the very best on earth—but still

The means, my friend—? 'Build not upon the sand,'
Says Scripture. If, upon the other hand,
The Offering—

FALK.

That's no trifle, I'm aware.

STRAWMAN.

Ah, come—that wholly alters the affair.
When men are zealous in their Offering,
And liberal—

FALK.

There he far surpasses most.

STRAWMAN.

"He" say you? How? In virtue of his post
The Offering is not what he has to bring
But what he has to get.

MRS. STRAWMAN [*looking towards the background*].

They're sitting there.

FALK [*after staring a moment in amazement, suddenly understands and bursts out laughing*].

Hurrah for Offerings—the ones that caper
And strut—on Holy-days—in bulging paper!

STRAWMAN.

All the year round the curb and bit we bear,
But Whitsuntide and Christmas make things square.

FALK [*gaily*].

Why then, provided only there's enough of it,
Even family-founders will obey their Calls.

STRAWMAN.

Of course; a man assured the *quantum suff.* of it
Will preach the Gospel to the cannibals.

[*Sotto voce.*

Now I must see if she cannot be led,

[*To one of the little girls.*

My little Mattie, fetch me out my head—
My pipe-head I should say, my little dear—

[*Feels in his coat-tail pocket.*

Nay, wait a moment tho': I have it here.

[*Goes across and fills his pipe, followed by his wife and children.*

GULDSTAD [*approaching*].

You seem to play the part of serpent in
This paradise of lovers.

FALK.

O, the pips
Upon the tree of knowledge are too green
To be a lure for anybody's lips.

[*To* LIND, *who comes in from the right.*

Ha, Lind!

LIND.

In heaven's name, who's been ravaging
Our sanctum? There the lamp lies dashed
To pieces, curtain dragged to floor, pen smashed,
And on the mantelpiece the ink pot splashed—

FALK [*clapping him on the shoulder*].

This wreck's the first announcement of my spring;
No more behind drawn curtains I will sit,
Making pen poetry with lamp alit;
My dull domestic poetising's done,
I'll walk by day, and glory in the sun:
My spring is come, my soul has broken free,
Action henceforth shall be my poetry.

LIND.

Make poetry of what you please for me;
But how if Mrs. Halm should take amiss
Your breaking of her furniture to pieces?

FALK.

What!—she, who lays her daughters and her nieces
Upon the altar of her boarders' bliss,—
She frown at such a bagatelle as this?

LIND [*angrily*].

It's utterly outrageous and unfair,
And compromises me as well as you!
But that's her business, settle it with her.
The lamp was mine, tho', shade and burner too—

FALK.

Tut, on that head, I've no account to render;
You have God's summer sunshine in its splendour,—
What would you with the lamp?

LIND.

You are grotesque;
You utterly forget that summer passes;
If I'm to make a figure in my classes
At Christmas I must buckle to my desk.

FALK [*staring at him*].

What, you look forward?

LIND.

To be sure I do,
The examination's amply worth it too.

FALK.

Ah but—you 'only sit and live'—remember!
Drunk with the moment, you demand no more—
Not even a modest third-class next December.
You've caught the bird of Fortune fair and fleet,
You feel as if the world with all its store
Were scattered in profusion at your feet.

LIND.

Those were my words; they must be understood,
Of course, *cum grano salis*—

FALK.

Very good!

LIND.

In the forenoons I will enjoy my bliss;
That I am quite resolved on—

FALK.

Daring man!

LIND.

I have my round of visits to the clan;
Time will run anyhow to waste in this;
But any further dislocation of
My study-plan I strongly disapprove.

FALK.

A week ago, however, you were bent
On going out into God's world with song.

LIND.

Yes, but I thought the tour a little long;
The fourteen days might well be better spent.

FALK.

Nay, but you had another argument
For staying; how the lovely dale for you
Was mountain air and winged warble too.

LIND.

Yes, to be sure, this air is unalloyed;
But all its benefits may be enjoyed
Over one's book without the slightest bar.

FALK.

But it was just the Book which failed, you see,
As Jacob's ladder—

LIND.

How perverse you are!
That is what people say when they are free—

FALK

[*looking at him and folding his hands in silent amazement*].

Thou also, Brutus!

LIND [*with a shade of confusion and annoyance*].

Pray remember, do!
That I have other duties now than you;
I have my *fiancée*. Every plighted pair,
Those of prolonged experience not excepted,—
Whose evidence you would not wish rejected,—
Will tell you, that if two are bound to fare
Through life together, they must—

FALK.

Prithee spare
The comment; who supplied it?

LIND.

Well, we'll say
Stiver, he's honest surely; and Miss Jay,
Who has such very great experience here,
She says—

FALK.

Well, but the Parson and his—dear?

LIND.

Yes, they're remarkable. There broods above
Them such placidity, such quietude,—
Conceive, she can't remember being wooed,
Has quite forgotten what is meant by love.

FALK.

Ah yes, when one has slumber'd over long,
The birds of memory refuse their song.

[*Laying his hand on* LIND'S *shoulder, with an ironical look.*

You, Lind, slept sound last night, I guarantee?

LIND.

And long. I went to bed in such depression,
And yet with such a fever in my brain,
I almost doubted if I could be sane.

FALK.

Ah yes, a sort of witchery, you see.

LIND.

Thank God I woke in perfect self-possession.

[*During the foregoing scene* STRAWMAN *has been seen from time to time walking in the background in lively conversation with* ANNA; MRS. STRAWMAN *and the children follow.* MISS JAY *now appears also, and with her* MRS. HALM *and other ladies.*

MISS JAY [*before she enters*].

Ah, Mr. Lind.

LIND [*to* FALK].

They're after me again!
Come, let us go.

MISS JAY.

Nay, nay, you must remain,
Let us make speedy end of the division
That has crept in between your love and you.

LIND.

Are we divided?

MISS JAY [*pointing to* ANNA, *who is standing further off in the garden*].

Gather the decision
From yon red eyes. The foreign mission drew
Those tears.

LIND.

But heavens, she was glad to go—

MISS JAY (*scoffing*].

Yes, to be sure, one would imagine so!
No, my dear Lind, you'll take another view
When you have heard the whole affair discussed;

LIND.

But then this warfare for the faith, you know,
Is my most cherished dream!

MISS JAY.

O who would build
On dreaming in this century of light?
Why, Stiver had a dream the other night;
There came a letter singularly sealed—

MRS. STRAWMAN.

It's treasure such a dream prognosticates.

MISS JAY [*nodding*].

Yes, and next day they sued him for the rates.

[*The ladies make a circle round* LIND *and go in conversation with him into the garden.*

STRAWMAN [*continuing, to* ANNA, *who faintly tries to escape*].

From these considerations, daughter mine,
From these considerations, buttressed all
With reason, morals, and the Word Divine,
You now perceive that to desert your Call
Were absolutely inexcusable.

ANNA [*half crying*].

Oh! I'm so young—

STRAWMAN.

And it is natural,
I own, that one should tremble to essay
These perils, dare the lures that there waylay;
But from doubt's tangle you must now break free,—
Be of good cheer and follow Moll and me!

MRS. STRAWMAN.

Yes, your dear mother tells me that I too
Was just as inconsolable as you
When we received our Call—

STRAWMAN.

And for like cause—
The fascination of the town—it was;
But when a little money had come in,
And the first pairs of infants, twin by twin,
She quite got over it.

FALK [*sotto voce to* STRAWMAN].

Bravo, you able
Persuader.

STRAWMAN [*nodding to him and turning again to* ANNA].

Now you've promised me, be stable.
Shall man renounce his work? Falk says the Call
Is not so very slender after all.
Did you not, Falk?

FALK.

Nay, pastor—

STRAWMAN.

To be sure—!
[*To* ANNA.
Of something then at least you are secure.
What's gained by giving up, if that is so?
Look back into the ages long ago,

See, Adam, Eve—the Ark, see, pair by pair,
Birds in the field—the lilies in the air,
The little birds—the little birds—the fishes—

[*Continues in a lower tone, as he withdraws with* ANNA.

[MISS JAY *and the* AUNTS *return with* LIND.

FALK.

Hurrah! Here come the veterans in array;
The old guard charging to retrieve the day!

MISS JAY.

Ah, in exact accordance with our wishes!
[*Aside.*
We have him, Falk!—Now let us tackle her!
[*Approaches* ANNA.

STRAWMAN [*with a deprecating motion*].

She needs no secular solicitation;
The Spirit has spoken, what can Earth bestead—?
[*Modestly.*
If in some small degree my words have sped,
Power was vouchsafed me—!

MRS. HALM.

Come, no more evasion,
Bring them together!

AUNTS [*with emotion*].

Ah, how exquisite!

STRAWMAN.

Yes, can there be a heart so dull and dead
As not to be entranced at such a sight!
It is so thrilling and so penetrating,
So lacerating, so exhilarating,
To see an innocent babe devoutly lay
Its offering on Duty's altar.

MRS. HALM.

Nay,
Her family have also done their part.

MISS JAY.

I and the Aunts—I should imagine so.
You, Lind, may have the key to Anna's heart,
[*Presses his hand.*
But we possess a picklock, you must know,
Able to open where the key avails not.
And if in years to come, cares throng and thwart,
Only apply to us, our friendship fails not.

MRS. HALM.

Yes, we shall hover round you all your life,—

MISS JAY.

And shield you from the fiend of wedded strife.

STRAWMAN.

Enchanting group! Love, friendship, hour of gladness,
Yet so pathetically touched with sadness.
[*Turning to* LIND.

But now, young man, pray make an end of this.
[*Leading* ANNA *to him.*
Take thy betrothed—receive her—with a kiss!

LIND [*giving his hand to* ANNA].
I stay at home!

ANNA [*at the same moment*].
I go with you!

ANNA [*amazed*].
You stay?

LIND [*equally so*].
You go with me?

ANNA [*with a helpless glance at the company*].
Why, then, we are divided as before!

LIND.
What's this?

THE LADIES.
What now?

MISS JAY [*excitedly*].
Our wills are all at war—

STRAWMAN.
She gave her solemn word to cross the sea
With him!

MISS JAY.

And he gave his to stay ashore
With her!

FALK [*laughing*].

They both complied; what would you more!

STRAWMAN.

These complications are too much for me.
[*Goes towards the background.*

AUNTS [*to one another*].

How in the world came they to disagree?

MRS. HALM

[*To* GULDSTAD *and* STIVER, *who have been walking in the garden and now approach.*
The spirit of discord's in possession here.
[*Talks aside to them.*

MRS. STRAWMAN

[*To* MISS JAY, *noticing that the table is being laid.*
There comes the tea.

MISS JAY [*curtly*].

Thank heaven.

FALK.

Hurrah! a cheer
For love and friendship, maiden aunts and tea!

STIVER.

But if the case stands thus, the whole proceeding
May easily be ended with a laugh;
All turns upon a single paragraph,
Which bids the wife attend the spouse. No pleading
Can wrest an ordinance so clearly stated—

MISS JAY.

Doubtless, but does that help us to agree?

STRAWMAN.

She must obey a law that heaven dictated.

STIVER.

But Lind can circumvent that law, you see.
[*To* LIND.
Put off your journey, and then—budge no jot.

AUNTS [*delighted*].

Yes, that's the way!

MRS. HALM.

Agreed!

MISS JAY.

That cuts the knot.

[SVANHILD *and the maids have meantime laid the tea-table beside the verandah steps. At* MRS. HALM'S *invitation the ladies sit down. The rest of the company take their places, partly on the ve-*

randah and in the summer-house, partly in the garden. FALK *sits on the verandah. During the following scene they drink tea.*

MRS. HALM [*smiling*].

And so our little storm is overblown.
Such summer showers do good when they are gone;
The sunshine greets us with a double boon,
And promises a cloudless afternoon.

MISS JAY.

Ah yes, Love's blossom without rainy skies
Would never thrive according to our wishes.

FALK.

In dry land set it, and it forthwith dies;
For in so far the flowers are like the fishes—

SVANHILD.

Nay, for Love lives, you know, upon the air—

MISS JAY.

Which is the death of fishes—

FALK.

So I say.

MISS JAY.

Aha, we've put a bridle on you there!

MRS. STRAWMAN.

The tea is good, one knows by the bouquet.

FALK.

Well, let us keep the simile you chose.
Love is a flower; for if heaven's blessed rain
Fall short, it all but pines to death— [*Pauses.*

MISS JAY.

What then?

FALK [*with a gallant bow*].

Then come the aunts with the reviving hose.—
But poets have this simile employed,
And men for scores of centuries enjoyed,—
Yet hardly one its secret sense has hit;
For flowers are manifold and infinite.
Say, then, what flower is love? Name me, who knows,
The flower most like it?

MISS JAY.

Why, it is the rose;
Good gracious, that's exceedingly well known;—
Love, all agree, lends life a rosy tone.

A YOUNG LADY.

It is the snowdrop; growing, snow enfurled;
Till it peer forth, undreamt of by the world.

AN AUNT.

It is the dandelion,—made robust
By dint of human heel and horse hoof thrust;
Nay, shooting forth afresh when it is smitten,
As Pedersen so charmingly has written.

LIND.

It is the bluebell,—ringing in for all
Young hearts life's joyous Whitsun festival.

MRS. HALM.

No, 'tis an evergreen,—as fresh and gay
In desolate December as in May.

GULDSTAD.

No, Iceland moss, dry gathered,—far the best
Cure for young ladies with a wounded breast.

A GENTLEMAN.

No, the wild chestnut tree,—in high repute
For household fuel, but with a bitter fruit.

SVANHILD.

No, a camellia; at our balls, 'tis said,
The chief adornment of a lady's head.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

No, it is like a flower, O such a bright one;—
Stay now—a blue one, no, it was a white one—
What is its name—? Dear me—the one I met—;
Well it is singular how I forget!

STIVER.

None of these flower similitudes will run.
The flowerpot is a likelier candidate.
There's only room in it, at once, for one;
But by progressive stages it holds eight.

STRAWMAN [*with his little girls round him*].

No, love's a pear tree; in the spring like snow
With myriad blossoms, which in summer grow
To pearlets; in the parent's sap each shares;—
And with God's help they'll all alike prove
pears.

FALK.

So many heads, so many sentences!
No, you all grope and blunder off the line.
Each simile's at fault; I'll tell you mine;—
You're free to turn and wrest it as you please.
[*Rises as if to make a speech.*
In the remotest east there grows a plant;
And the sun's cousin's garden is its haunt—

THE LADIES.

Ah, it's the tea-plant!

FALK.

Yes.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

His voice is so
Like Strawman's when he—

STRAWMAN.

Don't disturb his flow.

FALK.

It has its home in fabled lands serene;
Thousands of miles of desert lie between;—

Fill up, Lind!—So.—Now in a tea-oration,
I'll show of tea and Love the true relation.

[*The guests cluster round him.*

It has its home in the romantic land;
Alas, Love's home is also in Romance,
Only the Sun's descendants understand
The herb's right cultivation and advance.
With Love it is not otherwise than so.
Blood of the Sun along the veins must flow
If Love indeed therein is to strike root,
And burgeon into blossom, into fruit.

MISS JAY.

But China is an ancient land; you hold
In consequence that tea is very old—

STRAWMAN.

Past question antecedent to Jerusalem.

FALK.

Yes, 'twas already famous when Methusalem
His picture-books and rattles tore and flung—

MISS JAY [*triumphantly*].

And Love is in its very nature young!
To find a likeness there is pretty bold.

FALK.

No; Love, in truth, is also very old;
That principle we here no more dispute
Than do the folks of Rio or Beyrout.

Nay, there are those from Cayenne to Caithness,
Who stand upon its everlastingness;—
Well, that may be a slight exaggeration,
But old it is beyond all estimation.

MISS JAY.

But Love is all alike; whereas we see
Both good and bad and middling kinds of tea!

MRS. STRAWMAN.

Yes, they sell tea of many qualities.

ANNA.

The green spring shoots I count the very first—

SVANHILD.

Those serve to quench celestial daughters' thirst.

A YOUNG LADY.

Witching as ether fumes they say it is—

ANOTHER.

Balmy as lotus, sweet as almond, clear—

GULDSTAD.

That's not an article we deal in here.

FALK [*who has meanwhile come down from the verandah*].

Ah, ladies, every mortal has a small
Private celestial empire in his heart.
There bud such shoots in thousands, kept apart
By Shyness's soon shatter'd Chinese Wall.

But in her dim fantastic temple bower
The little Chinese puppet sits and sighs,
A dream of far-off wonders in her eyes—
And in her hand a golden tulip flower.
For her the tender firstling tendrils grew;—
Rich crop or meagre, what is that to you?
Instead of it we get an after crop
They kick the tree for, dust and stalk and stem,—
As hemp to silk beside what goes to them—

GULDSTAD.

That is the black tea.

FALK [*nodding*].

That's what fills the shop.

A GENTLEMAN.

There's beef tea too, that Holberg says a word of—

MISS JAY [*sharply*].

To modern taste entirely out of date.

FALK.

And a beef love has equally been heard of,
Wont—in romances—to brow-beat its mate,
And still they say its trace may be detected
Amongst the henpecked of the married state.
In short there's likeness where 'twas least expected.

So, as you know, an ancient proverb tells,
That something ever passes from the tea
Of the bouquet that lodges in its cells,
If it be carried hither over sea.
It must across the desert and the hills,—
Pay toll to Cossack and to Russian tills;—
It gets their stamp and licence, that's enough,
We buy it as the true and genuine stuff.
But has not Love the self-same path to fare?
Across Life's desert? How the world would rave
And shriek if you or I should boldly bear
Our Love by way of Freedom's ocean wave!
"Good heavens, his moral savour's passed away,
"And quite dispersed Legality's bouquet!"—

STRAWMAN [*rising*].

Yes, happily,—in every moral land
Such wares continue to be contraband!

FALK.

Yes, to pass current here, Love must have cross'd
The great Siberian waste of regulations,
Fann'd by no breath of ocean to its cost;
It must produce official attestations
From friends and kindred, devils of relations,
From church curators, organist and clerk,
And other fine folks—over and above
The primal licence which God gave to Love.—
And then the last great point of likeness;—mark

How heavily the hand of culture weighs
Upon that far Celestial domain;
Its power is shatter'd, and its wall decays,
The last true Mandarin's strangled; hands profane
Already are put forth to share the spoil;
Soon the Sun's realm will be a legend vain,
An idle tale incredible to sense;
The world is gray in gray—we've flung the soil
On buried Faery,—we have made her mound.
But if we have,—then where can Love be found?
Alas, Love also is departed hence!
[*Lifts his cup.*
Well let him go, since so the times decree;—
A health to Amor, late of Earth,—in tea!
[*He drains his cup; indignant murmurs amongst the company.*

MISS JAY.

A very odd expression! "Dead" indeed!

THE LADIES.

To say that Love is dead—!

STRAWMAN.

Why, here you see
Him sitting, rosy, round and sound, at tea,
In all conditions! Here in her sable weed
The widow—

MISS JAY.

Here a couple, true and tried,—

STIVER.

With many ample pledges fortified.

GULDSTAD.

Then Love's light cavalry, of maid and man,
The plighted pairs in order—

STRAWMAN.

In the van
The veterans, whose troth has laughed to scorn
The tooth of Time—

MISS JAY [*hastily interrupting*].

And then the babes new-born—
The little novices of yester-morn—

STRAWMAN.

Spring, summer, autumn, winter, in a word,
Are here; the truth is patent, past all doubt,
It can be clutched and handled, seen and heard,—

FALK.

What then?

MISS JAY.

And yet you want to thrust it out!

FALK.

Madam, you quite mistake. In all I spoke
I cast no doubt on anything you claim;
But I would fain remind you that, from smoke,
We cannot logically argue flame.
That men are married, and have children, I
Have no desire whatever to deny;
Nor do I dream of doubting that such things
Are in the world as troth and wedding-rings;

That billets-doux some tender hands indite
And seal with pairs of turtle doves that—
fight;
That sweethearts swarm in cottage and in hall,
That chocolate rewards the wedding-call;
That usage and convention have decreed,
In every point, how "Lovers" shall proceed:—
But, heavens! We've majors also by the score,
Arsenals heaped with muniments of war,
With spurs and howitzers and drums and shot,
But what does that permit us to infer?
That we have men who dangle swords, but not
That they will wield the weapons that they
wear.
Tho' all the plain with gleaming tents you
crowd,
Does that make heroes of the men they shroud?

STRAWMAN.

Well, all in moderation; I must own,
It is not quite conducive to the truth
That we should paint the enamourment of youth
So bright, as if—ahem—it stood alone.
Love-making still a frail foundation is.
Only the snuggery of wedded bliss
Provides a rock where Love may builded be
In unassailable security.

MISS JAY.

There I entirely differ. In my view,
A free accord of lovers, heart with heart,
Who hold together, having leave to part,
Gives the best warrant that their love is true.

ANNA [*warmly*].

O no—Love's bond when it is fresh and young
Is of a stuff more precious and more strong.

LIND [*thoughtfully*].

Possibly the ideal flower may blow,
Even as that snowdrop,—hidden by the snow.

FALK [*with a sudden outburst*].

You fallen Adam! There a heart was cleft
With longing for the Eden it has left!

LIND.

What stuff!

MRS. HALM [*offended, to* FALK, *rising*].

'Tis not a very friendly act
To stir a quarrel where we've made a peace.
As for your friend's good fortune, be at ease—

SOME LADIES.

Nay that's assured—

OTHERS.

A very certain fact.

MRS. HALM.

The cooking-class at school, I must confess,
She did not take; but she shall learn it still.

MISS JAY.

With her own hands she's trimming her own dress

AN AUNT [*patting* ANNA'S *hand*].

And growing exquisitely sensible.

FALK [*laughing aloud*].

O parody of sense, that rives and rends
In maniac dance upon the lips of friends!
Was it good sense he wanted? Or a she-
Professor of the lore of Cookery?
A joyous son of springtime he came here,
For the wild rosebud on the bush he burned.
You reared the rosebud for him; he returned—
And for his rose found what? The hip!

MISS JAY [*offended*].

You jeer!

FALK.

A useful household condiment, heaven knows!
But yet the hip was not his bridal rose.

MRS. HALM.

O, if it is a ball-room queen he wants,
I'm very sorry; these are not their haunts.

FALK.

O yes, I know the pretty coquetry
They carry on with "Domesticity."
It is a suckling of the mighty Lie
That, like hop-tendrils, spreads itself on high.

I, madam, reverently bare my head
To the ball queen; a child of beauty she—
And the ideal's golden woof is spread
In ball-rooms, hardly in the nursery.

MRS. HALM [*with suppressed bitterness*].

Your conduct, sir, is easily explained;
A plighted lover cannot be a friend;
That is the kernel of the whole affair;
I have a very large experience there.

FALK.

No doubt,—with seven nieces, each a wife—

MRS. HALM.

And each a happy wife—

FALK [*with emphasis*].

Ah, do we know?

GULDSTAD.

How!

MISS JAY.

Mr. Falk!

LIND.

Are you resolved to sow
Dissension?

FALK [*vehemently*].

Yes, war, discord, turmoil, strife!

STIVER.

What you, a lay, profane outsider here!

FALK.

No matter, still the battle-flag I'll rear!
Yes, it is war I mean with nail and tooth
Against the Lie with the tenacious root,
The lie that you have fostered into fruit,
For all its strutting in the guise of truth!

STIVER.

Against these groundless charges I protest,
Reserving right of action—

MISS JAY.

Do be still!

FALK.

So then it is Love's ever-running rill
That tells the widow what she once possess'd,—
That very Love that, in the days gone by,
Out of her language blotted "moan" and "sigh"!
So then it is Love's brimming tide that rolls
Along the placid veins of wedded souls,—
That very Love that faced the iron sleet,
Trampling inane Convention under feet,
And scoffing at the impotent discreet!
So then it is Love's beauty-kindled flame
That keeps the plighted from the taint of time
Year after year! Ah yes, the very same
That made our young bureaucrat blaze in rhyme!

So it is Love's young bliss that will not brave
The voyage over vaulted Ocean's wave,
But asks a sacrifice when, like the sun,
Its face should fill with glory, making one!
Ah no, you vulgar prophets of the Lie,
Give things the names we ought to know them by;
Call widows' passion—wanting what they miss,
And wedlock's habit—call it what it is!

STRAWMAN.

Young man, this insolence has gone too far!
In every word there's scoffing and defiance.
[*Goes close up to* FALK.
Now I'll gird up my aged loins to war
For hallowed custom against modern science!

FALK.

I go to battle as it were a feast!

STRAWMAN.

Good! For your bullets I will be a beacon:—
[*Nearer.*
A wedded pair is holy, like a priest—

STIVER [*at* FALK'S *other side*].

And a betrothed—

FALK.

Half-holy, like the deacon.

STRAWMAN.

Behold these children; — see, — this little throng!
Io triumphe may for them be sung!
How was it possible—how practicable—;
The words of truth are strong, inexorable;—
He has no hearing whom they cannot move.
See,—every one of them's a child of Love—!

[*Stops in confusion.*

That is—you understand—I would have said—!

MISS JAY [*fanning herself with her handkerchief*].

This is a very mystical oration!

FALK.

There you yourself provide the demonstration,—
A good old Norse one, sound, true-born, homebred.
You draw distinction between wedded pledges
And those of Love: your Logic's without flaw.
They are distinguished just as roast from raw,
As hothouse bloom from wilding of the hedges!
Love is with us a science and an art;
It long since ceased to animate the heart.
Love is with us a trade, a special line
Of business, with its union, code and sign;
It is a guild of married folks and plighted,
Past-masters with apprentices united;
For they cohere compact as jelly-fishes,
A singing-club their single want and wish is—

GULDSTAD.

And a gazette!

FALK.

A good suggestion, yes!
We too must have our organ in the press,
Like ladies, athletes, boys, and devotees.
Don't ask the price at present, if you please.
There I'll parade each amatory fetter
That John and Thomas to our town unites,
There publish every pink and perfumed letter
That William to his tender Jane indites;
There you shall read, among "Distressing Scenes"—
Instead of murders and burnt crinolines,
The broken matches that the week's afforded;
There under "goods for sale" you'll find what firms
Will furnish cast-off rings on easy terms;
There double, treble births will be recorded;
No wedding, but our rallying rub-a-dub
Shall drum to the performance all the club;
No suit rejected, but we'll set it down,
In letters large, with other news of weight
Thus: "Amor-Moloch, we regret to state,
Has claimed another victim in our town."
You'll see, we'll catch subscribers: once in sight
Of the propitious season when they bite,
By way of throwing them the bait they'll brook
I'll stick a nice young man upon my hook.
Yes, you will see me battle for our cause,
With tiger's, nay with editorial, claws
Rending them—

GULDSTAD.

And the paper's name will be—?

FALK.

Amor's Norse Chronicle of Archery.

STIVER [*going nearer*].

You're not in earnest, you will never stake
Your name and fame for such a fancy's sake!

FALK.

I'm in grim earnest. We are often told
Men cannot live on love; I'll show that this
Is an untenable hypothesis;
For Love will prove to be a mine of gold:
Particularly if Miss Jay, perhaps,
Will Mr. Strawman's "Life's Romance" unfold,
As appetising feuilleton, in scraps.

STRAWMAN [*in terror*].

Merciful heaven! My "life's romance!"
What, what!
When was my life romantic, if you please?

MISS JAY.

I never said so.

STIVER.

Witness disagrees.

STRAWMAN.

That I have ever swerved a single jot
From social prescript,—is a monstrous lie.

FALK.

Good.

[*Clapping* STIVER *on the shoulder.*

Here's a friend who will not put me by.
We'll start with Stiver's lyric ecstasies.

STIVER [*after a glance of horror at* STRAWMAN].

Are you quite mad! Nay then I must be heard!
You dare accuse me for a poet—

MISS JAY.

How—!

FALK.

Your office has averred it anyhow.

STIVER [*in towering anger*].

Sir, by our office nothing is averred.

FALK.

Well, leave me then, you also: I have by me
One comrade yet whose loyalty will last.
"A true heart's story" Lind will not deny me,
Whose troth's too tender for the ocean blast,
Who for his mistress makes surrender of
His fellow-men—pure quintessence of Love!

MRS. HALM.

My patience, Mr. Falk, is now worn out.
The same abode no longer can receive us:—
I beg of you this very day to leave us—

FALK [*with a bow as* MRS. HALM *and the company withdraw*].

That this would come I never had a doubt!

STRAWMAN.

Between us two there's battle to the death;
You've slandered me, my wife, my little flock,
From Molly down to Millie, in one breath.
Crow on, crow on—Emancipation's cock,—

[*Goes in, followed by his wife and children.*

FALK.

And go you on observing Peter's faith
To Love your lord—who, thanks to your advice,
Was thrice denied before the cock crew thrice!

MISS JAY [*turning faint*].

Attend me, Stiver! help me get unlaced
My corset—this way, this way—do make haste!

STIVER [*to* FALK *as he withdraws with* MISS JAY *on his arm*].

I here renounce your friendship.

LIND.

I likewise.

FALK [*seriously*].
You too, my Lind?

LIND.
Farewell.

FALK.
You were my nearest one—

LIND.
No help, it is the pleasure of my dearest one.
[*He goes in:* SVANHILD *has remained standing on the verandah steps.*

FALK.
So, now I've made a clearance, have free course
In all directions!

SVANHILD.
Falk, one word with you!

FALK [*pointing politely to the house*].
That way, Miss Halm;—that way, with all the force
Of aunts and inmates, Mrs. Halm withdrew.

SVANHILD [*nearer to him*].
Let them withdraw; their ways and mine divide;
I will not swell the number of their band.

FALK.
You'll stay?

SVANHILD.

If you make war on lies, I stand
A trusty armour-bearer by your side.

FALK.

You, Svanhild, you who—

SVANHILD.

I, who—yesterday—?
Were you yourself, Falk, yesterday the same?
You bade me be a sallow, for your play.

FALK.

And a sweet sallow sang me into shame.
No, you are right: I was a child to ask;
But you have fired me to a nobler task.
Right in the midst of men the Church is founded
Where Truth's appealing clarion must be sounded
We are not called, like demigods, to gaze on
The battle from the far-off mountain's crest,
But in our hearts to bear our fiery blazon,
An Olaf's cross upon a mailed breast,—
To look afar across the fields of flight,
Tho' pent within the mazes of its might,—
Beyond the mirk descry one glimmer still
Of glory—that's the Call we must fulfil.

SVANHILD.

And you'll fulfil it when you break from men,
Stand free, alone,—

FALK.

Did I frequent them then?
And there lies duty. No, that time's gone by,—
My solitary compact with the sky.
My four-wall-chamber poetry is done;
My verse shall live in forest and in field,
I'll fight under the splendour of the sun;—
I or the Lie—one of us two must yield!

SVANHILD.

Then forth with God from Verse to Derring-doe!
I did you wrong: you have a feeling heart;
Forgive me,—and as good friends let us part—

FALK.

Nay, in my future there is room for two!
We part not. Svanhild, if you dare decide,
We'll battle on together side by side.

SVANHILD.

We battle?

FALK.

See, I have no friend, no mate,
By all abandoned, I make war on all:
At me they aim the piercing shafts of hate;
Say, do you dare with me to stand or fall?
Henceforth along the beaten walks I'll move
Heedful of each constraining etiquette;
Spread, like the rest of men, my board, and set
The ring upon the finger of my love!

[*Takes a ring from his finger and holds it up.*

SVANHILD [*in breathless suspense*].
You mean that?

FALK.
Yes, by us the world shall see,
Love has an everlasting energy,
That suffers not its splendour to take hurt
From the day's dust, the common highway's dirt.
Last night I showed you the ideal aflame,
Beaconing from a dizzy mountain's brow.
You shuddered, for you were a woman,—now
I show you woman's veritable aim;—
A soul like yours, what it has vowed, will keep.
You see the abyss before you,—Svanhild, leap!

SVANHILD [*almost inaudibly*].
If we should fail—!

FALK [*exulting*].
No, in your eyes I see
A gleam that surely prophesies our winning!

SVANHILD.
Then take me as I am, take all of me!
Now buds the young leaf; now my spring's beginning!

[*She flings herself boldly into his arms as the curtain falls.*

ACT THIRD.

Evening. Bright moonlight. Coloured lanterns are hung about the trees. In the background are covered tables with bottles, glasses, biscuits, etc. From the house, which is lighted up from top to bottom, subdued music and singing are heard during the following scene. SVANHILD *stands on the verandah.* FALK *comes from the right with some books and a portfolio under his arm. The* PORTER *follows with a portmanteau and a knapsack.*

FALK.

That's all, then?

PORTER.

Yes, sir, all is in the pack,
But just a satchel, and the paletot.

FALK.

Good; when I go, I'll take them on my back.
Now off. See, this is the portfolio.

PORTER.

It's locked, I see.

FALK.

Locked, Peter.

PORTER.

Good, sir.

FALK.

Pray,
Make haste and burn it.

PORTER.

Burn it?

FALK.

Yes, to ash—
[*Smiling.*
With every draft upon poetic cash;
As for the books, you're welcome to them.

PORTER.

Nay,
Such payment is above a poor man's earning.
But, sir, I'm thinking, if you can bestow
Your books, you must have done with all your learning?

FALK.

Whatever can be learnt from books I know,
And rather more.

PORTER.

More? Nay, that's hard, I doubt!

FALK.

Well, now be off; the carriers wait without.
Just help them load the barrow ere you go.
[*The* PORTER *goes out to the left.*

FALK [*approaching* SVANHILD *who comes to meet him*].

One moment's ours, my Svanhild, in the light
Of God and of the lustrous summer night.
How the stars glitter thro' the leafage, see,
Like bright fruit hanging on the great world-tree.
Now slavery's last manacle I slip,
Now for the last time feel the wealing whip;
Like Israel at the Passover I stand,
Loins girded for the desert, staff in hand.
Dull generation, from whose sight is hid
The Promised Land beyond that desert flight,
Thrall tricked with knighthood, never the more knight,
Tomb thyself kinglike in the Pyramid,—
I cross the barren desert to be free.
My ship strides on despite an ebbing sea;
But there the Legion Lie shall find its doom,
And glut one deep, dark, hollow-vaulted tomb.

[*A short pause; he looks at her and takes her hand.*

You are so still!

SVANHILD.

So happy! Suffer me,
O suffer me in silence still to dream.
Speak you for me; my budding thoughts, grown strong,
One after one will burgeon into song,
Like lilies in the bosom of the stream.

FALK.

O say it once again, in truth's pure tone
Beyond the fear of doubt, that thou art mine!
O say it, Svanhild, say—

SVANHILD [*throwing herself on his neck*].

Yes, I am thine!

FALK.

Thou singing-bird God sent me for my own!

SVANHILD.

Homeless within my mother's house I dwelt,
Lonely in all I thought, in all I felt,
A guest unbidden at the feast of mirth,—
Accounted nothing—less than nothing—worth.
Then you appeared! For the first time I heard
My own thought uttered in another's word;
To my lame visions you gave wings and feet—
You young unmasker of the Obsolete!
Half with your caustic keenness you alarmed me,
Half with your radiant eloquence you charmed me,
As sea-girt forests summon with their spell
The sea their flinty beaches still repel.
Now I have read the bottom of your soul,
Now you have won me, undivided, whole;
Dear forest, where my tossing billows beat,
My tide's at flood and never will retreat!

FALK.

And I thank God that in the bath of Pain
He purged my love. What strong compulsion drew
Me on I knew not, till I saw in you
The treasure I had blindly sought in vain.
I praise Him, who our love has lifted thus
To noble rank by sorrow,—licensed us
To a triumphal progress, bade us sweep
Thro' fen and forest to our castle-keep,
A noble pair, astride on Pegasus!

SVANHILD [*pointing to the house*].

The whole house, see, is making feast to-night.
There, in their honour, every room's alight,
There cheerful talk and joyous song ring out;
On the highroad no passer-by will doubt
That men are happy where they are so gay.
[*With compassion.*
Poor sister!—happy in the great world's way!

FALK.

"Poor" sister, say you?

SVANHILD.

Has she not divided
With kith and kin the treasure of her soul,
Her capital to fifty hands confided,
So that not one is debtor for the whole?
From no one has she all things to receive,
For no one has she utterly to live.
O beside my wealth hers is little worth;
I have but one possession upon earth.

My heart was lordless when with trumpet blare
And multitudinous song you came, its king,
The banners of my thought your ensign bear,
You fill my soul with glory, like the spring.
Yes, I must needs thank God, when it is past,
That I was lonely till I found out thee,—
That I lay dead until the trumpet blast
Waken'd me from the world's frivolity.

FALK.

Yes we, who have no friends on earth, we twain
Own the true wealth, the golden fortune,—we
Who stand without, beside the starlit sea,
And watch the indoor revel thro' the pane.
Let the lamp glitter and the song resound,
Let the dance madly eddy round and round;—
Look up, my Svanhild, into yon deep blue,—
There glitter little lamps in thousands, too—

SVANHILD.

And hark, beloved, thro' the limes there floats
This balmy eve a chorus of sweet notes—

FALK.

It is for us that fretted vault's aglow—

SVANHILD.

It is for us the vale is loud below!

FALK.

I feel myself like God's lost prodigal;
I left Him for the world's delusive charms.
With mild reproof He wooed me to His arms;
And when I come, He lights the vaulted hall,

Prepares a banquet for the son restored,
And makes His noblest creature my reward.
From this time forth I'll never leave that Light,—
But stand its armed defender in the fight;
Nothing shall part us, and our life shall prove
A song of glory to triumphant love!

SVANHILD.

And see how easy triumph is for two,
When he's a man—

FALK.

She, woman thro' and thro';—
It is impossible for such to fall!

SVANHILD.

Then up, and to the war with want and sorrow;
This very hour I will declare it all!

[*Pointing to* FALK'S *ring on her finger.*

FALK [*hastily*].

No, Svanhild, not to-night, wait till to-morrow!
To-night we gather our young love's red rose;
'Twere sacrilege to smirch it with the prose
Of common day.

[*The door into the garden-room opens.*

Your mother's coming! Hide!
No eye this night shall see thee as my bride!

[*They go out among the trees by the summer-house.* MRS. HALM *and* GULDSTAD *come out on the balcony.*

MRS. HALM.

He's really going?

GULDSTAD.

Seems so, I admit.

STIVER [*coming*].

He's going, madam!

MRS. HALM.

We're aware of it!

STIVER.

A most unfortunate punctilio.
He'll keep his word; his stubbornness I know.
In the Gazette he'll put us all by name;
My love will figure under leaded headings,
With jilts, and twins, and countermanded weddings.
Listen; I tell you, if it weren't for shame,
I would propose an armistice, a truce—

MRS. HALM.

You think he would be willing?

STIVER.

I deduce
The fact from certain signs, which indicate
That his tall talk about his Amor's News
Was uttered in a far from sober state.

One proof especially, if not transcendent,
Yet tells most heavily against defendant:
It has been clearly proved that after dinner
To his and Lind's joint chamber he withdrew,
And there displayed such singular demeanour
As leaves no question—

GULDSTAD.

[*Sees a glimpse of* FALK *and* SVANHILD, *who separate,* FALK *going to the background;* SVANHILD *remains standing hidden by the summer-house.*

Hold, we have the clue!
Madam, one word!—Falk does not mean to go,
Or if he does, he means it as a friend.

STIVER.

How, you believe then—?

MRS. HALM.

What do you intend?

GULDSTAD.

With the least possible delay I'll show
That matters move precisely as you would.
Merely a word in private—

MRS. HALM.

Very good.

[*They go together into the garden and are seen from time to time in lively conversation.*

STIVER

[*Descending into the garden discovers* FALK, *who is standing by the water and gazing over it.*

These poets are mere men of vengeance, we
State servants understand diplomacy.
I need to labour for myself—

[*Seeing* STRAWMAN, *who enters from the garden-room.*

Well met!

STRAWMAN [*on the verandah*].

He's really leaving! [*Going down to* STIVER.
Ah, my dear sir, let
Me beg you just a moment to go in
And hold my wife—

STIVER.

I—hold her, sir?

STRAWMAN.

I mean
In talk. The little ones and we are so
Unused to be divided, there is no
Escaping—

[*His wife and children appear in the door.*

Ha! already on my trail.

MRS. STRAWMAN.

Where are you, Strawman?

STRAWMAN [*aside to* STIVER].

Do invent some tale,
Something amusing—something to beguile!

STIVER [*going on to the verandah*].

Pray, madam, have you read the official charge?
A masterpiece of literary style.

[*Takes a book from his pocket.*

Which I shall now proceed to cite at large.

[*Ushers her politely into the room, and follows himself.* FALK *comes forward; he and* STRAWMAN *meet; they regard one another a moment in silence.*

STRAWMAN.

Well?

FALK.

Well?

STRAWMAN.

Falk!

FALK.

Pastor!

STRAWMAN.

Are you less
Intractable than when we parted?

FALK.

Nay,
I go my own inexorable way—

STRAWMAN.

Even tho' you crush another's happiness?

FALK.

I plant the flower of knowledge in its place.
[*Smiling.*
If, by the way, you have not ceased to think
Of the Gazette—

STRAWMAN.

Ah, that was all a joke?

FALK.

Yes, pluck up courage, that will turn to smoke;
I break the ice in action, not in ink.

STRAWMAN.

But even though you spare me, sure enough
There's one who won't so lightly let me off;
He has the advantage, and he won't forego it,
That lawyer's clerk—and 'tis to you I owe it;
You raked the ashes of our faded flames,
And you may take your oath he won't be still
If once I mutter but a syllable
Against the brazen bluster of his claims.
These civil-service gentlemen, they say,
Are very potent in the press to-day.
A trumpery paragraph can lay me low,
Once printed in that Samson-like Gazette
That with the jaw of asses fells its foe,
And runs away with tackle and with net,
Especially towards the quarter day—

FALK [*acquiescing*].

Ah, were there scandal in the case, indeed—

STRAWMAN [*despondently*].

No matter. Read its columns with good heed,
You'll see me offered up to Vengeance.

FALK [*whimsically*].

Nay,
To retribution—well-earned punishment.
Thro' all our life there runs a Nemesis,
Which may delay, but never will relent,
And grants to none exception or release.
Who wrongs the Ideal? Straight there rushes in
The Press, its guardian with the Argus eye,
And the offender suffers for his sin.

STRAWMAN.

But in the name of heaven, what pledge have I
Given this "Ideal" that's ever on your tongue?
I'm married, have a family, twelve young
And helpless innocents to clothe and keep;
I have my daily calls on every side,
Churches remote and glebe and pasture wide,
Great herds of breeding cattle, ghostly sheep—
All to be watched and cared for, clipt and fed,
Grain to be winnowed, compost to be spread;—
Wanted all day in shippon and in stall,
What time have *I* to serve the "Ideal" withal?

FALK.

Then get you home with what dispatch you may,
Creep snugly in before the winter-cold;
Look, in young Norway dawns at last the day,
Thousand brave hearts are in its ranks enroll'd,
Its banners in the morning breezes play!

STRAWMAN.

And if, young man, I were to take my way
With bag and baggage home, with everything
That made me yesterday a little king,
Were mine the only *volte face* to-day?
Think you I carry back the wealth I brought?

[*As* FALK *is about to answer.*

Nay, listen, let me first explain my thought.

[*Coming nearer.*

Time was when I was young, like you, and played
Like you, the unconquerable Titan's part;
Year after year I toiled and moiled for bread,
Which hardens a man's hand, but not his heart.
For northern fells my lonely home surrounded,
And by my parish bounds my world was bounded.
My home—Ah, Falk, I wonder, do you know
What home is?

FALK [*curtly*].

I have never known.

STRAWMAN.

Just so.
That is a home, where five may dwell with ease,
Tho' two would be a crowd, if enemies.
That is a home, where all your thoughts play free
As boys and girls about their father's knee,
Where speech no sooner touches heart, than tongue
Darts back an answering harmony of song;
Where you may grow from flax-haired snowy-polled,
And not a soul take note that you grow old;
Where memories grow fairer as they fade,
Like far blue peaks beyond the forest glade.

FALK [*with constrained sarcasm*].

Come, you grow warm—

STRAWMAN.

Where you but jeered and flouted.
So utterly unlike God made us two!
I'm bare of that he lavished upon you.
But I have won the game where you were routed.
Seen from the clouds, full many a wayside grain
Of truth seems empty chaff and husks. You'd soar
To heaven, I scarcely reach the stable door,
One bird's an eagle born—

FALK.

And one a hen.

STRAWMAN.

Yes, laugh away, and say it be so, grant
I am a hen. There clusters to my cluck
A crowd of little chickens,—which you want!
And I've the hen's high spirit and her pluck,
And for my little ones forget myself.
You think me dull, I know it. Possibly
You pass a harsher judgment yet, decree
Me over covetous of worldly pelf.
Good, on that head we will not disagree.

[*Seizes* FALK'S *arm and continues in a low tone but with gathering vehemence.*

You're right, I'm dull and dense and grasping, yes;
But grasping for my God-given babes and wife,
And dense from struggling blindly for bare life,
And dull from sailing seas of loneliness.
Just when the pinnace of my youthful dream
Into the everlasting deep went down,
Another started from the ocean stream
Borne with a fair wind onward to life's crown.
For every dream that vanished in the wave,
For every buoyant plume that broke asunder,
God sent me in return a little Wonder,
And gratefully I took the good He gave.
For them I strove, for them amassed, annexed,—
For them, for them, explained the Holy text;
My clustering girls, my garden of delight!
On them you've poured the venom of your spite!
You've proved, with all the cunning of the schools,
My bliss was but the paradise of fools,
That all I took for earnest was a jest;—
Now I implore, give me my quiet breast
Again, the flawless peace of mind I had—

FALK.

Prove, in a word, your title to be glad?

STRAWMAN.

Yes, in my path you've cast the stone of doubt,
And nobody but you can cast it out.
Between my kin and me you've set a bar,—
Remove the bar, the strangling noose undo—

FALK.

You possibly believe I keep the glue
Of lies for Happiness's broken jar?

STRAWMAN.

I do believe, the faith your reasons tore
To shreds, your reasons may again restore;
The limb that you have shatter'd, you can set;
Reverse your judgment,—the whole truth unfold,
Restate the case—I'll fly my banner yet—

FALK [*haughtily*].

I stamp no copper Happiness as gold.

STRAWMAN [*looking fixedly at him*].

Remember then that, lately, one whose scent
For truth is of the keenest told us this:

[*With uplifted finger.*

"There runs through all our life a Nemesis,
Which may delay, but never will relent."

[*He goes towards the house.*

STIVER

[*Coming out with glasses on, and an open book in his hand.*

Pastor, you must come flying like the blast!
Your girls are sobbing—

THE CHILDREN [*in the doorway*].

Pa!

STIVER.

And Madam waiting!

[STRAWMAN *goes in.*

This lady has no talent for debating.

[*Puts the book and glasses in his pocket, and approaches* FALK.

Falk!

FALK.

Yes!

STIVER.

I hope you've changed your mind at last?

FALK.

Why so?

STIVER.

For obvious reasons. To betray
Communications made in confidence,
Is conduct utterly without defence.
They must not pass the lips.

FALK.

No, I've heard say
It is at times a risky game to play.

STIVER.

The very devil!

FALK.

Only for the great.

STIVER [*zealously*].

No, no, for all us servants of the state.
Only imagine how my future chances
Would dwindle, if the governor once knew
I keep a Pegasus that neighs and prances
In office hours—and such an office, too!
From first to last, you know, in our profession,
The winged horse is viewed with reprobation:
But worst of all would be, if it got wind
That I against our primal law had sinn'd
By bringing secret matters to the light—

FALK.

That's penal, is it—such an oversight?

STIVER [*mysteriously*].

It can a servant of the state compel
To beg for his dismissal out of hand.
On us officials lies a strict command,
Even by the hearth to be inscrutable.

FALK.

O those despotical authorities,
Muzzling the—clerk that treadeth out the grain!

STIVER [*shrugging his shoulders*].

It is the law; to murmur is in vain.
Moreover, at a moment such as this,
When salary revision is in train,
It is not well to advertise one's views
Of office time's true function and right use.
That's why I beg you to be silent; look,
A word may forfeit my—

FALK.

Portfolio?

STIVER.

Officially it's called a transcript book;
A protocol's the clasp upon the veil of snow
That shrouds the modest breast of the Bureau.
What lies beneath you must not seek to know.

FALK.

And yet I only spoke at your desire;
You hinted at your literary crop.

STIVER.

How should I guess he'd grovel in the mire
So deep, this parson perch'd on fortune's top,
A man with snug appointments, children, wife,
And money to defy the ills of life?
If such a man prove such a Philistine,
What shall of us poor copyists be said?
Of me, who drive the quill and rule the line,
A man engaged and shortly to be wed,
With family in prospect—and so forth?

[*More vehemently.*

O, if I only had a well-lined berth,
I'd bind the armour'd helmet on my head,
And cry defiance to united earth!
And were I only unengaged like you,
Trust me, I'd break a road athwart the snow
Of Prose, and carry the Ideal through!

FALK.

To work then, man!

STIVER.

How?

FALK.

You may still do so!
Let the world's prudish owl unheeded flutter by;
Freedom converts the grub into a butterfly!

STIVER [*stepping back*].

You mean, to break the engagement—?

FALK.

That's my mind;—
The fruit is gone, why keep the empty rind?

STIVER.

Such a proposal's for a green young shoot,
Not for a man of judgment and repute.
I heed not what King Christian in his time
(The Fifth) laid down about engagements broken-off;
For that relationship is nowhere spoken of
In any rubric of the code of crime.
The act would not be criminal in name,
It would in no way violate the laws—

FALK.

Why there, you see then!

STIVER [*firmly*].

Yes, but all the same,—
I must reject all pleas in such a cause.
Staunch comrades we have been in times of dearth;
Of life's disport she asks but little share,
And I'm a homely fellow, long aware
God made me for the ledger and the hearth.
Let others emulate the eagle's flight,
Life in the lowly plains may be as bright.
What does his Excellency Goethe say
About the white and shining milky way?
Man may not there the milk of fortune skim,
Nor is the butter of it meant for him.

FALK.

Why, even were fortune-churning our life's goal,
The labour must be guided by the soul;—
Be citizens of the time that is—but then
Make the time worthy of the citizen.
In homely things lurks beauty, without doubt,
But watchful eye and brain must draw it out.
Not every man who loves the soil he turns
May therefore claim to be another Burns.

STIVER.

Then let us each our proper path pursue,
And part in peace; we shall not hamper you;
We keep the road, you hover in the sky,
There where we too once floated, she and I.

But work, not song, provides our daily bread,
And when a man's alive, his music's dead.
A young man's life's a lawsuit, and the most
Superfluous litigation in existence:
Withdraw, make terms, abandon all resistance:
Plead where and how you will, your suit is lost.

FALK [*bold and confident, with a glance at the summer-house*].

Nay, tho' I took it to the highest place,—
Judgment, I know, would be reversed by grace!
I know two hearts can live a life complete,
With hope still ardent, and with faith still sweet;
You preach the wretched gospel of the hour,
That the Ideal is secondary!

STIVER.

No!
It's primary: appointed, like the flower,
To generate the fruit, and then to go.

[*Indoors,* MISS JAY *plays and sings: "In the Gloaming."* STIVER *stands listening in silent emotion.*

With the same melody she calls me yet
Which thrilled me to the heart when first we met.

[*Lays his hand on* FALK'S *arm and gazes intently at him.*

Oft as she wakens those pathetic notes,
From the white keys reverberating floats
An echo of the "yes" that made her mine.
And when our passions shall one day decline,

To live again as friendship, to the last
That song shall link that present to this past.
And what tho' at the desk my back grow round,
And my day's work a battle for mere bread,
Yet joy will lead me homeward, where the dead
Enchantment will be born again in sound.
If one poor bit of evening we can claim,
I shall come off undamaged from the game!

[*He goes into the house.* FALK *turns towards the summer-house.* SVANHILD *comes out, she is pale and agitated. They gaze at each other in silence a moment, and fling themselves impetuously into each other's arms.*

FALK.

O, Svanhild, let us battle side by side!
Thou fresh glad blossom flowering by the tomb,—
See what the life is that they call youth's bloom!
There's coffin-stench of bridegroom and of bride;
There's coffin-stench wherever two go by
At the street corner, smiling outwardly,
With falsehood's reeking sepulchre beneath,
And in their blood the apathy of death.
And this they think is living! Heaven and earth,
Is such a load so many antics worth?
For such an end to haul up babes in shoals,
To pamper them with honesty and reason,
To feed them fat with faith one sorry season,
For service, after killing-day, as souls?

SVANHILD.

Falk, let us travel!

FALK.

Travel? Whither, then?
Is not the whole world everywhere the same?
And does not Truth's own mirror in its frame
Lie equally to all the sons of men?
No, we will stay and watch the merry game,
The conjurer's trick, the tragi-comedy
Of liars that are dupes of their own lie;
Stiver and Lind, the Parson and his dame,
See them,—prize oxen harness'd to love's yoke,
And yet at bottom very decent folk!
Each wears for others and himself a mask,
Yet one too innocent to take to task;
Each one, a stranded sailor on a wreck,
Counts himself happy as the gods in heaven;
Each his own hand from Paradise has driven,
Then, splash! into the sulphur to the neck!
But none has any inkling where he lies,
Each thinks himself a knight of Paradise,
And each sits smiling between howl and howl;
And if the Fiend come by with jeer and growl,
With horns, and hoofs, and things yet more abhorred,—
Then each man jogs the neighbour at his jowl:
"Off with your hat, man! See, there goes the Lord!"

SVANHILD [*after a brief thoughtful silence*].

How marvellous a love my steps has led
To this sweet trysting place! My life that sped

In frolic and fantastic visions gay,
Henceforth shall grow one ceaseless working day!
O God! I wandered groping,—all was dim:
Thou gavest me light—and I discovered him!
[*Gazing at* FALK *in love and wonder.*
Whence is that strength of thine, thou mighty tree
That stand'st unshaken in the wind-wrecked wood,
That stand'st alone, and yet canst shelter me—?

FALK.

God's truth, my Svanhild;—that gives fortitude.

SVANHILD [*with a shy glance towards the house*].

They came like tempters, evilly inclined,
Each spokesman for his half of humankind,
One asking: How can true love reach its goal
When riches' leaden weight subdues the soul?
The other asking: How can true love speed
When life's a battle to the death with Need?
O horrible!—to bid the world receive
That teaching as the truth, and yet to live!

FALK.

How if 'twere meant for us?

SVANHILD.

For us?—What, then?
Can outward fate control the wills of men?

I have already said: if thou'lt stand fast,
I'll dare and suffer by thee to the last.
How light to listen to the gospel's voice,
To leave one's home behind, to weep, rejoice,
And take with God the husband of one's choice!

FALK [*embracing her*].

Come then, and blow thy worst, thou winter weather!
We stand unshaken, for we stand together!

[MRS. HALM *and* GULDSTAD *come in from the right in the background.*

GULDSTAD [*aside*].

Observe!

[FALK *and* SVANHILD *remain standing by the summer-house.*

MRS. HALM [*surprised*].

Together!

GULDSTAD.

Do you doubt it now?

MRS. HALM.

This is most singular.

GULDSTAD.

O, I've noted how
His work of late absorb'd his interest.

MRS. HALM [*to herself*].
Who would have fancied Svanhild was so sly?
[*Vivaciously to* GULDSTAD.
But no—I can't think.

GULDSTAD.
Put it to the test.

MRS. HALM.
Now, on the spot?

GULDSTAD.
Yes, and decisively!

MRS. HALM [*giving him her hand*].
God's blessing with you!

GULDSTAD [*gravely*].
Thanks, it may bestead.
[*Comes to the front.*

MRS. HALM [*looking back as she goes towards the house*].
Whichever way it goes, my child is sped.
[*Goes in.*

GULDSTAD [*approaching* FALK].
It's late, I think?

FALK.
Ten minutes and I go.

GULDSTAD.

Sufficient for my purpose.

SVANHILD [*going*].

Farewell.

GULDSTAD.

No,

Remain.

SVANHILD.

Shall I?

GULDSTAD.

Until you've answered me.
It's time we squared accounts. It's time we three
Talked out for once together from the heart.

FALK [*taken aback*].

We three?

GULDSTAD.

Yes,—all disguises flung apart.

FALK [*suppressing a smile*].

O, at your service.

GULDSTAD.

Very good, then hear.
We've been acquainted now for half a year;
We've wrangled—

FALK.

Yes.

GULDSTAD.

We've been in constant feud;
We've changed hard blows enough. You fought—alone—
For a sublime ideal; I as one
Among the money-grubbing multitude.
And yet it seemed as if a chord united
Us two, as if a thousand thoughts that lay
Deep in my own youth's memory benighted
Had started at your bidding into day.
Yes, I amaze you. But this hair grey-sprinkled
Once fluttered brown in spring-time, and this brow,
Which daily occupation moistens now
With sweat of labour, was not always wrinkled.
Enough; I am a man of business, hence—

FALK [*with gentle sarcasm*].

You are the type of practical good sense.

GULDSTAD.

And you are hope's own singer young and fain.
[*Stepping between them.*
Just therefore, Falk and Svanhild, I am here.
Now let us talk, then; for the hour is near
Which brings good hap or sorrow in its train.

FALK [*in suspense*].

Speak, then!

GULDSTAD [*smiling*].

My ground is, as I said last night,
A kind of poetry—

FALK.

In practice.

GULDSTAD [*nodding slowly*].

Right!

FALK.

And if one asked the source from which you drew—?

GULDSTAD

[*Glancing a moment at* SVANHILD, *and then turning again to* FALK.

A common source discovered by us two.

SVANHILD.

Now I must go.

GULDSTAD.

No, wait till I conclude.
I should not ask so much of others. You,
Svanhild, I've learnt to fathom thro' and thro';
You are too sensible to play the prude.
I watched expand, unfold, your little life;
A perfect woman I divined within you,
But long I only saw a daughter in you;—
Now I ask of you—will you be my wife?

[SVANHILD *draws back in embarrassment.*

FALK [*seizing his arm*].

Hold!

GULDSTAD.

Patience; she must answer. Put your own
Question;—then her decision will be free.

FALK.

I—do you say?

GULDSTAD [*looking steadily at him*].

The happiness of three
Lives is at stake to-day,—not mine alone.
Don't fancy it concerns you less than me;
For tho' base matter is my chosen sphere,
Yet nature made me something of a seer.
Yes, Falk, you love her. Gladly, I confess,
I saw your young love bursting into flower.
But this young passion, with its lawless power,
May be the ruin of her happiness.

FALK [*firing up*].

You have the face to say so?

GULDSTAD [*quietly*].

Years give right.
Say now you won her—

FALK [*defiantly*].

And what then?

GULDSTAD [*slowly and emphatically*].

Yes, say
She ventured in one bottom to embark
Her all, her all upon one card to play,—
And then life's tempest swept the ship away,
And the flower faded as the day grew dark?

FALK [*involuntarily*].

She must not!

GULDSTAD [*looking at him with meaning*].

Hm. So I myself decided
When I was young, like you. In days of old
I was afire for one. Our paths divided.
Last night we met again;—the fire was cold.

FALK.

Last night?

GULDSTAD.

Last night. You know the parson's dame—

FALK.

What? It was she, then, who—

GULDSTAD.

Who lit the flame.
Long I remembered her with keen regret,
And still in my remembrance she arose
As the young lovely woman that she was
When in life's buoyant spring-time first we met.

And that same foolish fire you now are fain
To light, that game of hazard you would dare.
See, that is why I call to you—beware!
The game is perilous! Pause, and think again!

FALK.

No, to the whole tea-caucus I declared
My fixed and unassailable belief—

GULDSTAD [*completing his sentence*].

That heartfelt love can weather unimpaired
Custom, and Poverty, and Age, and Grief.
Well, say it be so; possibly you're right;
But see the matter in another light.
What love is, no man ever told us—whence
It issues, that ecstatic confidence
That one life may fulfil itself in two,—
To this no mortal ever found the clue.
But marriage is a practical concern,
As also is betrothal, my good sir—
And by experience easily we learn
That we are fitted just for her, or her.
But love, you know, goes blindly to its fate,
Chooses a woman, not a wife, for mate;
And what if now this chosen woman was
No wife for you—?

FALK [*in suspense*].

Well?

GULDSTAD [*shrugging his shoulders*].

Then you've lost your cause.
To make a happy bridegroom and a bride
Demands not love alone, but much beside,

Relations one can meet with satisfaction,
Ideas that do not wholly disagree.
And marriage? Why, it is a very sea
Of claims and calls, of taxing and exaction,
Whose bearing upon love is very small.
Here mild domestic virtues are demanded,
A kitchen soul, inventive and neat handed,
Making no claims, and executing all;—
And much which in a lady's presence I
Can hardly with decorum specify.

FALK.

And therefore—?

GULDSTAD.

Hear a golden counsel then.
Use your experience; watch your fellow-men,
How every loving couple struts and swaggers
Like millionaires among a world of beggars.
They scamper to the altar, lad and lass,
They make a home and, drunk with exultation,
Dwell for awhile within its walls of glass.
Then comes the day of reckoning;—out, alas,
They're bankrupt, and their house in liquidation!
Bankrupt the bloom of youth on woman's brow,
Bankrupt the flower of passion in her breast,
Bankrupt the husband's battle-ardour now,
Bankrupt each spark of passion he possessed.
Bankrupt the whole estate, below, above,—
And yet this broken pair were once confessed
A first-class house in all the wares of love!

FALK [*vehemently*].

That is a lie!

GULDSTAD [*unmoved*].

Some hours ago 'twas true
However. I have only quoted you;—
In these same words you challenged to the field
The "caucus" with love's name upon your shield.
Then rang repudiation fast and thick
From all directions, as from you at present;
Incredible, I know; who finds it pleasant
To hear the name of death when he is sick?
Look at the priest! A painter and composer
Of taste and spirit when he wooed his bride;—
What wonder if the man became a proser
When she was snugly settled by his side?
To be his lady-love she was most fit;
To be his wife, tho'—not a bit of it.
And then the clerk, who once wrote clever numbers?
No sooner was the gallant plighted, fixed,
Than all his rhymes ran counter and got mixed;
And now his Muse continuously slumbers,
Lullabied by the law's eternal hum.
Thus you see— [*Looks at* SVANHILD.
Are you cold?

SVANHILD [*softly*].

No.

FALK [*with forced humour*].

Since the sum
Works out a minus then in every case
And never shows a plus,—why should you be

So resolute your capital to place
In such a questionable lottery?
It almost looks as if you fancied Fate
Had meant you for a bankrupt from your birth?

GULDSTAD [*looks at him, smiles, and shakes his head*].

My bold young Falk, reserve a while your mirth.—
There are two ways of founding an estate.
It may be built on credit—drafts long-dated
On pleasure in a never-ending bout,
On perpetuity of youth unbated,
And permanent postponement of the gout.
It may be built on lips of rosy red,
On sparkling eyes and locks of flowing gold,
On trust these glories never will be shed,
Nor the dread hour of periwigs be tolled.
It may be built on thoughts that glow and quiver,—
Flowers blowing in the sandy wilderness,—
On hearts that, to the end of life, for ever
Throb with the passion of the primal "yes."
To dealings such as this the world extends
One epithet: 'tis known as "humbug," friends.

FALK.

I see, you are a dangerous attorney,
You—well-to-do, a millionaire may-be;
While two broad backs could carry in one journey
All that beneath the sun belongs to me.

GULDSTAD [*sharply*].

What do you mean?

FALK.

That is not hard to see.
For the sound way of building, I suppose,
Is just with cash—the wonder-working paint
That round the widow's batten'd forehead throws
The aureole of a young adored saint.

GULDSTAD.

O no, 'tis something better that I meant.
'Tis the still flow of generous esteem,
Which no less honours the recipient
Than does young rapture's giddy-whirling dream.
It is the feeling of the blessedness
Of service, and home quiet, and tender ties,
The joy of mutual self-sacrifice,
Of keeping watch lest any stone distress
Her footsteps wheresoe'er her pathway lies;
It is the healing arm of a true friend,
The manly muscle that no burdens bend,
The constancy no length of years decays,
The arm that stoutly lifts and firmly stays.
This, Svanhild, is the contribution I
Bring to your fortune's fabric: now, reply.

[SVANHILD *makes an effort to speak;*
GULDSTAD *lifts his hand to check her.*

Consider well before you give your voice!
With clear deliberation make your choice.

FALK.

And how have you discovered—

GULDSTAD.

That you love her?
That in your eyes 'twas easy to discover.
Let her too know it. [*Presses his hand.*
Now I will go in.
Let the jest cease and earnest work begin;
And if you undertake that till the end
You'll be to her no less a faithful friend,
A staff to lean on, and a help in need,
Than I can be— [*Turning to* SVANHILD.
Why, good, my offer's nought;
Cancel it from the tables of your thought.
Then it is I who triumph in very deed;
You're happy, and for nothing else I fought.
[*To* FALK.
And, apropos—just now you spoke of cash,
Trust me, 'tis little more than tinsell'd trash.
I have no ties, stand perfectly alone;
To you I will make over all I own;
My daughter she shall be, and you my son.
You know I have a business by the border:
There I'll retire, you set your home in order,
And we'll foregather when a year is gone.
Now, Falk, you know me; with the same precision
Observe yourself: the voyage down life's stream,
Remember, is no pastime and no dream.
Now, in the name of God—make your decision!

[*Goes into the house. Pause.* FALK *and* SVANHILD *look shyly at each other.*

FALK.

You are so pale.

SVANHILD.

And you so silent.

FALK.

True.

SVANHILD.

He smote us hardest.

FALK [*to himself*].

Stole my armour, too.

SVANHILD.

What blows he struck!

FALK.

He knew to place them well.

SVANHILD.

All seemed to go to pieces where they fell.

[*Coming nearer to him.*

How rich in one another's wealth before
We were, when all had left us in despite,
And Thought rose upward like the echoing roar
Of breakers in the silence of the night.
With exultation then we faced the fray,
And confidence that Love is lord of death;—
He came with worldly cunning, stole our faith,
Sowed doubt,—and all the glory pass'd away!

FALK [*with wild vehemence*].

Tear, tear it from thy memory! All his talk
Was true for others, but for us a lie!

SVANHILD [*slowly shaking her head*].

The golden grain, hail-stricken on its stalk,
Will never more wave wanton to the sky.

FALK [*with an outburst of anguish*].

Yes, we two, Svanhild—!

SVANHILD.

Hence with hopes that snare!
If you sow falsehood, you must reap despair.
For others true, you say? And do you doubt
That each of them, like us, is sure, alike,
That he's the man the lightning will not strike,
And no avenging thunder will find out,
Whom the blue storm-cloud, scudding up the sky
On wings of tempest, never can come nigh?

FALK.

The others split their souls on scattered ends:
Thy single love my being comprehends.
They're hoarse with yelling in life's Babel din:
I in this quiet shelter fold thee in.

SVANHILD.

But if love, notwithstanding, should decay,
—Love being Happiness's single stay—
Could you avert, then, Happiness's fall?

FALK.

No, my love's ruin were the wreck of all.

SVANHILD.

And can you promise me before the Lord
That it will last, not drooping like the flower,
But smell as sweet as now till life's last hour?

FALK [*after a short pause*].

It will last long.

SVANHILD [*with anguish*].

"Long!" "Long!"—Poor starveling word!
Can "long" give any comfort in Love's need?
It is her death-doom, blight upon her seed.
"My faith is, Love will never pass away"—
That song must cease, and in its stead be heard:
"My faith is, that I loved you yesterday!"
[*As uplifted by inspiration.*
No, no, not thus our day of bliss shall wane,
Flag drearily to west in clouds and rain;—
But at high noontide, when it is most bright,
Plunge sudden, like a meteor, into night!

FALK [*in anguish*].

What would you, Svanhild?

SVANHILD.

We are of the Spring;
No Autumn shall come after, when the bird
Of music in thy breast shall not be heard,
And long not thither where it first took wing.

Nor ever Winter shall his snowy shroud
Lay on the clay-cold body of our bliss;—
This Love of ours, ardent and glad and proud,
Pure of disease's taint and age's cloud,
Shall die the young and glorious thing it is!

FALK [*in deep pain*].
And far from thee—what would be left of life?

SVANHILD.
And near me what were left—if Love depart?

FALK.
A home!

SVANHILD.
Where Joy would gasp in mortal strife.
[*Firmly.*
It was not given to me to be your wife.
That is the clear conviction of my heart!
In courtship's merry pastime I can lead,
But not sustain your spirit in its need.
[*Nearer and with gathering fire.*
Now we have revell'd out a feast of spring;
No thought of slumber's sluggard couch come nigh!
Let Joy amid delirious song make wing
And flock with choirs of cherubim on high.
And tho' the vessel of our fate capsize,
One plank yet breasts the waters, strong to save;—
The fearless swimmer reaches Paradise!
Let Joy go down into his watery grave;
Our Love shall yet in triumph, by God's hand,
Be borne from out the wreckage safe to land!

FALK.

O, I divine thee! But—to sever thus!
Now, when the portals of the world stand wide,—
When the blue spring is bending over us,
On the same day that plighted thee my bride!

SVANHILD.

Just therefore must we part. Our joy's torch fire
Will from this moment wane till it expire!
And when at last our worldly days are spent,
And face to face with our great Judge we stand,
And, as a righteous God, he shall demand
Of us the earthly treasure that he lent—
Then, Falk, we cry—past power of Grace to save—
"O Lord, we lost it going to the grave!"

FALK [*with strong resolve*].

Pluck off the ring!

SVANHILD [*with fire*].

Wilt thou?

FALK.

Now I divine!
Thus and no otherwise canst thou be mine!
As the grave opens into life's Dawn-fire,
So Love with Life may not espoused be
Till, loosed from longing and from wild desire,
It soars into the heaven of memory!
Pluck off the ring, Svanhild!

SVANHILD [*in rapture*].

My task is done!
Now I have filled thy soul with song and sun.
Forth! Now thou soarest on triumphant wings,—
Forth! Now thy Svanhild is the swan that sings!

[*Takes off the ring and presses a kiss upon it.*

To the abysmal ooze of ocean bed
Descend, my dream!—I fling thee in its stead!

[*Goes a few steps back, throws the ring into the fjord, and approaches* FALK *with a transfigured expression.*

Now for this earthly life I have foregone thee,—
But for the life eternal I have won thee!

FALK [*firmly*].

And now to the day's duties, each, alone.
Our paths no more will mingle. Each must wage
His warfare single-handed, without moan.
We caught the fevered frenzy of the age,
Fain without fighting to secure the spoil,
Win Sabbath ease, and shirk the six days' toil,
Tho' we are called to strive and to forego.

SVANHILD.

But not in sickness.

FALK.

No,—made strong by truth.
Our heads no penal flood will overflow;
This never-dying memory of our youth
Shall gleam against the cloud-wrack like the bow
Of promise flaming in its colours seven,—
Sign that we are in harmony with heaven.
That gleam your quiet duties shall make bright—

SVANHILD.

And speed the poet in his upward flight!

FALK.

The poet, yes; for poets all men are
Who see, thro' all their labours, mean or great,
In pulpit or in schoolroom, church or state,
The Ideal's lone beacon-splendour flame afar.
Yes, upward is my flight; the winged steed
Is saddled; I am strung for noble deed.
And now, farewell!

SVANHILD.

Farewell!

FALK [*embracing her*].

One kiss!

SVANHILD.

The last!

[*Tears herself free.*

Now I can lose thee gladly till life's past!

FALK.

Tho' quenched were all the light of earth and sky,—
The thought of light is God, and cannot die.

SVANHILD [*withdrawing towards the background*].

Farewell! [*Goes further.*

FALK.

Farewell—gladly I cry again—
[*Waves his hat.*
Hurrah for love, God's glorious gift to men!

[*The door opens.* FALK *withdraws to the right; the younger guests come out with merry laughter.*

THE YOUNG GIRLS.

A lawn dance!

A YOUNG GIRL.

Dancing's life!

ANOTHER.

A garland spread
With dewy blossoms fresh on every head!

SEVERAL.

Yes, to the dance, the dance!

ALL.

And ne'er to bed!

[STIVER *comes out with* STRAWMAN *arm in arm.* MRS. STRAWMAN *and the children follow.*

STIVER.

Yes, you and I henceforward are fast friends.

STRAWMAN.

Allied in battle for our common ends.

STIVER.

When the twin forces of the State agree—

STRAWMAN.

They add to all men's—

STIVER [*hastily*].

Gains!

STRAWMAN.

And gaiety.

[MRS. HALM, LIND, ANNA, GULDSTAD, *and* MISS JAY, *with the other guests, come out. All eyes are turned upon* FALK *and* SVANHILD. *General amazement when they are seen standing apart.*

MISS JAY [*among the* AUNTS, *clasping her hands*].

What! Am I awake or dreaming, pray?

LIND [*who has noticed nothing*].

I have a brother's compliments to pay.

[*He, with the other guests, approaches* FALK, *but starts involuntarily and steps back on looking at him.*

What is the matter with you? You're a Janus
With double face!

FALK [*smiling*].

I cry, like old Montanus,
The earth is flat, Messieurs;—my optics lied;
Flat as a pancake—are you satisfied?

[*Goes quickly out to the right.*

MISS JAY.

Refused!

THE AUNTS.

Refused!

MRS. HALM.

Hush, ladies, if you please!

[*Goes across to* SVANHILD.

MRS. STRAWMAN [*to* STRAWMAN].

Fancy, refused!

STRAWMAN.

It cannot be!

MISS JAY.

It is!

THE LADIES [*from mouth to mouth*].

Refused! Refused! Refused!

[*They gather in little groups about the garden.*

STIVER [*dumfounded*].

He courting? How?

STRAWMAN.

Yes, think! He laugh'd at us, ha, ha—but now—

[*They gaze at each other speechless.*

ANNA [*to* LIND].

That's good! He was too horrid, to be sure!

LIND [*embracing her*].

Hurrah, now thou art mine, entire and whole.

[*They go outside into the garden.*

GULDSTAD [*looking back towards* SVANHILD].

Something is shattered in a certain soul;
But what is yet alive in it I'll cure.

STRAWMAN [*recovering himself and embracing* STIVER].

Now then, you can be very well contented
To have your dear *fiancée* for a spouse.

STIVER.

And you complacently can see your house
With little Strawmans every year augmented.

STRAWMAN

[*Rubbing his hands with satisfaction and looking after* FALK.

Insolent fellow! Well, it served him right;—
Would all these knowing knaves were in his plight!

[*They go across in conversation;* MRS. HALM *approaches with* SVANHILD.

MRS. HALM [*aside, eagerly*].

And nothing binds you?

SVANHILD.

Nothing.

MRS. HALM.

Good, you know
A daughter's duty—

SVANHILD.

Guide me, I obey.

MRS. HALM.

Thanks, child. [*Pointing to* GULDSTAD.
He is a rich and *comme il faut Parti;* and since there's nothing in the way—·

SVANHILD.

Yes, there is one condition I require!—
To leave this place.

MRS. HALM.

Precisely his desire.

SVANHILD.

And time—

MRS. HALM.

How long? Bethink you, fortune's calling!

SVANHILD [*with a quiet smile*].

Only a little; till the leaves are falling.

[*She goes towards the verandah;* MRS. HALM *seeks out* GULDSTAD.

STRAWMAN [*among the guests*].

One lesson, friends, we learn from this example!
Tho' Doubt's beleaguering forces hem us in,
Yet Truth upon the Serpent's head shall trample,
The cause of Love shall win—

GUESTS.

Yes, Love shall win!

[*They embrace and kiss, pair by pair. Outside to the left are heard song and laughter.*

MISS JAY.

What can this mean?

ANNA.

The students!

LIND.

The quartette,
Bound for the mountains;—and I quite forgot
To tell them—

[*The* STUDENTS *come in to the left and remain standing at the entrance.*

A STUDENT [*to* LIND].

Here we are upon the spot!

MRS. HALM.

It's Lind you seek, then?

MISS JAY.

That's unfortunate.
He's just engaged—

AN AUNT.

And so, you may be sure,
He cannot think of going on a tour.

THE STUDENTS.

Engaged!

ALL THE STUDENTS.

Congratulations!

LIND [*to his comrades*].

Thanks, my friends!

THE STUDENT [*to his comrades*].

There goes our whole fish-kettle in the fire!
Our tenor lost! No possible amends!

FALK

[*Coming from the right, in summer suit, with student's cap, knapsack and stick.*

*I'*ll sing the tenor in young Norway's choir!

THE STUDENTS.

You, Falk! hurrah!

FALK.

Forth to the mountains, come!
As the bee hurries from her winter home!
A twofold music in my breast I bear,
A cither with diversely sounding strings,
One for life's joy, a treble loud and clear,
And one deep note that quivers as it sings.

[*To individuals among the* STUDENTS.

You have the palette?—You the note-book? Good,
Swarm then, my bees, into the leafy wood,
Till at night-fall with pollen-laden thigh,
Home to our mighty mother-queen we fly!

[*Turning to the company, while the* STUDENTS *depart and the Chorus of the First Act is faintly heard outside.*

Forgive me my offences great and small,
I resent nothing;— [*Softly.*
but remember all.

STRAWMAN [*beaming with happiness*].
Now fortune's garden once again is green!
My wife has hopes,—a sweet presentiment—
[*Draws him whispering apart.*
She lately whispered of a glad event—
[*Inaudible words intervene.*
If all goes well . . . at Michaelmas . . . thirteen!

STIVER
[*With* MISS JAY *on his arm, turning to* FALK, *smiles triumphantly, and says, pointing to* STRAWMAN:
I'm going to start a household, flush of pelf!

MISS JAY [*with an ironical courtesy*].
I shall put on my wedding-ring next Yule.

ANNA [*similarly, as she takes* LIND'S *arm*].
My Lind will stay, the Church can mind itself—

LIND [*hiding his embarrassment*].
And seek an opening in a ladies' school.

MRS. HALM.
I cultivate my Anna's capabilities—

GULDSTAD [*gravely*].

An unromantic poem I mean to make
Of one who only lives for duty's sake.

FALK [*with a smile to the whole company*].

I go to scale the Future's possibilities!
Farewell! [*Softly to* SVANHILD.
God bless thee, bride of my life's dawn,
Where'er I be, to nobler deed thou'lt wake me.
[*Waves his hat and follows the* STUDENTS.

SVANHILD

[*Looks after him a moment, then says, softly but firmly:*

Now over is my life, by lea and lawn,
The leaves are falling;—now the world may take me.

[*At this moment the piano strikes up a dance, and champagne corks explode in the background. The gentlemen hurry to and fro with their ladies on their arms.* GULDSTAD *approaches* SVANHILD *and bows: she starts momentarily, then collects herself and gives him her hand.* MRS. HALM *and her family, who have watched the scene in suspense, throng about them with expressions of rapture, which are overpowered by the music and the merriment of the dancers in the garden.*

[*But from the country the following chorus rings loud and defiant through the dance music:*

CHORUS OF FALK AND THE STUDENTS.

And what if I shattered my roaming bark,
It was passing sweet to be roaming!

MOST OF THE COMPANY.

Hurrah!

[*Dance and merriment; the curtain falls.*

NOTES

P. 18. "*William Russel.*" An original historic tragedy, founded upon the career of the ill-fated Lord William Russell, by Andreas Munch, cousin of the historian P. A. Munch. It was produced at Christiania in 1857, the year of Ibsen's return from Bergen, and reviewed by him in the *Illustreret Nyhedsblad* for that year, Nos. 51 and 52. Professor Johan Storm of Christiania, to whose kindness I owe these particulars, adds that "it is rather a fine play and created a certain sensation in its time; but Munch is forgotten."

P. 20. *A grey old stager.* Ibsen's friend P. Botten-Hansen, author of the play *Hyldrebryllupet.*

P. 59. *A Svanhild like the old.* In the tale of the Völsungs Svanhild was the daughter of Sigurd and Gudrun,—the Siegfried and Kriemhild of the *Nibelungenlied.* The fierce king Jormunrek, hearing of her matchless beauty, sends his son Randwer to woo her in his name. Randwer is, however, induced to woo her in his own, and the girl approves. Jormunrek thereupon causes Randwer to be arrested and hanged, and meeting with Svanhild, as he and his men ride home from the hunt, tramples her to death under their horses' hoofs. Gudrun incites her sons Sorli and Hamdir to avenge their sister; they boldly enter Jormunrek's hall, and succeed in cutting off his hands and feet, but are themselves slain by his men. This last dramatic episode is told in the Eddic *Hamthismol.*

P. 94. *In the remotest east there grows a plant.* The germ of the famous tea-simile is due to Fru Collett's romance,

"The Official's Daughters" (*cf.* Introduction, p. ix.). But she exploits the idea only under a single and obvious aspect, viz., the comparison of the tender bloom of love with the precious firstling blade which brews the quintessential tea for the Chinese emperor's table; what the world calls love being, like what it calls tea, a coarse and flavorless after-crop. Ibsen has, it will be seen, given a number of ingenious developments to the analogy. I know Fru Collett's work only through the accounts of it given by Brandes and Jæger.

P. 135. *Another Burns.* In the original: "Dölen" ("The Dalesman"), that is A. O. Vinje, Ibsen's friend and literary comrade, editor of the journal so-called and hence known familiarly by its name. See the Introduction.

P. 160. *Like Old Montanus.* The hero of Holberg's comedy *Erasmus Montanus*, who returns from foreign travel to his native parish with the discovery that the world is *not* flat. Public indignation is aroused, and Montanus finds it expedient to announce that his eyes had deceived him, that "the world *is* flat, gentlemen."